

July 31, 2016

THE BLIND SEE, THE MUTE SPEAK

Matthew 9:27-34

In what ways might you still be spiritually blind or spiritually mute?

I don't do it often, but it seems relevant today, having already spoken about the healing power of Christ in the two previous sermons from Matthew's Chapter Nine, where Jesus healed a woman who suffered from twelve years of hemorrhaging on His way to raising the dead daughter of a Jewish leader, ...to offer a more allegorical exposition of these two new healing stories: the blind men and the mute.

Now by *allegorical*, I mean that the blindness of the two men appealing to the mercy of "*The Son of David*" can represent the spiritual blindness of all humankind; and that the muteness of the demon-possessed man can represent the inability of all humankind to speak as they would. A good example of such allegory is seen in the explanations of the parables of the weeds among the wheat and the sower in Matthew 13:18-23 and 37-43; both of which we will come to in greater detail down the road as I continue to preach through the Gospel of Matthew.

Giving an allegorical interpretation to these stories does not mean that I don't believe two actual blind men received their sight and a possessed mute began to speak. I do. I simply felt inspired this week to emphasize the relevance of our need to see and our need to speak... the truth.

SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS – When Jesus is asked why He taught in parables, He said: *The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand." With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: "You will indeed listen but never understand and you will indeed look but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn – and I would heal them."* (Matthew 13:13-15) There's a famous quote: There are none so blind as those who refuse to see. Matthew Henry (1662 – 1714) made it popular. He was an English Presbyterian pastor and writer. It may have been in use as a cultural proverb before he popularized it in writing, but it is more often than not attributed to him. I would put the emphasis on the word *refuse*. From my point of view as a believer, I feel as though those who do not believe, after the wonderful truth has been expressed in their presence are *refusing* to see it. *Choosing* not to believe, they are blind.

In our Scripture passage for today, the two blind men "saw" something in Jesus. They understood a reality that moved them to make their appeal. They cried out: "*Have mercy on us... Son of David!*" (v.27) Calling Jesus *Son of David* is the same as calling Him *Christ*. He asked them, "*Do you believe that I am able to do this?*" And they said, "*Yes, Lord!*" Not just *Yes*, but *Yes, Lord!* *Then He touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you!" And their sight was restored!"* (9:28-30a)

In what ways are you spiritually blind? What could convince you that Jesus *is* the Son of David, the Christ? Is the truth most Christians believe something you just can't completely trust? Or, who do you know that might be spiritually blind in this way, unwilling to see the truth about Jesus? ...unable to accept it rather than refuse it? Doubt is not the enemy of faith, indifference and denial is. If not these,

then a vain sense of self-righteousness, where people think they are too smart or too self-reliant to believe in Jesus, or, to believe in what the Scriptures say.

What can we do for them? Part of what some of them may need is to learn more *trust*. If they can learn to trust *you* in some way, that's a good start. It may be harder for them to come to a point of trust when it comes to the *institution* of organized religion, but step by step, the Church can be a source of belief as the people who make up the Church are seen as believable, reliable, trustworthy. That's what makes the Church relevant!

SPIRITUAL MUTENESS – Too many believers are just unable to say much about what they believe! They may know the truth; they may trust it; but their faith is just not something they really want to talk about. I think our culture actually began to discourage people from talking about their faith several generations ago. Faith became intellectualized as our culture became more modernized, and diverse. And now, we hear stories of how children are suspended and teachers are rebuked for speaking publically about their beliefs. This is just plain wrong.

But why, when Jesus Christ means so much to so many, are His words and His ways hardly ever discussed beyond the Church? Well, to begin with, we don't want to come across *judgmentally*. But we can come across *graciously*. It's hard to know when to bring up the subjects of faith, salvation, belief, grace, and worship. Too often we do so re-actively. We are reacting to some moral behavior that faith would condemn. And that's why we sound so judgmental. What we need to do is be more pro-active. Start the conversation with an issue of faith. "My pastor says there is a lot of spiritual blindness in our culture..." "My pastor spoke about spiritual muteness, and I think he's right..."

If you don't like that, start with a passage of Scripture: "Jesus healed two blind men..." "Jesus healed a man who couldn't speak..." Ask them what they think about that! You, all of us, have so much to say, but we're so afraid to say anything lest we offend someone, that we just stay mute. Come on! We should be offended when people refuse to hear the truth! It's the TRUTH! Sure, they may say that the Bible stories are just stories... But...they mean something! At least to us! At least they should!

Look at what happened when the two blind men began to see. Jesus said, "*See (!) that no one knows about this!*" But they went away and spread the news about Him all over that region! (vs. 30-31) You'd think the man who couldn't speak would have done a lot of talking about Jesus when he was healed, and he would have been one to truly spread the word! I think another thing that leaves us spiritually blind and spiritually mute is a fear of being called a hypocrite. Don't be afraid! *Be* accused of being a hypocrite! You'll have that much more to talk about...because you have been changed. Your hypocrisy has been healed! You know the truth now; and you want to proclaim it.

A last issue that blinds us and takes away our will to speak is seen in the way the Pharisees reacted: "*He casts out demons by the prince of demons!*" (v.34) Meanwhile, others are amazed, saying, "*We never saw anything like this in all Israel!*" (v. 33) Denial makes us critical. We need to justify our denial by finding fault with the message or with the messenger. How many people stray away from the message because they lose respect for the messenger? It's like denying the light because you don't like the color of the flame, or, the craft of the lamp!

See the truth! Speak the truth! Do not hide your light under a bushel. Let it shine! You are healed!