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I have a hard time seeing, for as long as I can remember, I've had to wear glasses. Without them, the world appears fuzzy, with objects a few feet in front of me turning into a blurry patch. When I first put on glasses as a child, I was amazed to see things for the first time: leaves on trees, birds in the air, letters on the chalkboard at school. Things most of us take for granted, but without glasses, these ordinary objects were lost to me.

If I had lived during the time of Jesus, I might have heard how Roman philosopher Seneca looked through a glass globe of water to read books, or if I had lived during the Middle Ages, I might have learned from the monks how to use a glass sphere as a magnifying glass.¹

I'm grateful that I am living after the year 1290 when

the first eyeglasses were estimated to have been made in northern Italy: In a sermon delivered on 23 February 1306, the Dominican friar Giordano da Pisa...wrote "It is not yet twenty years since there was found the art of making eyeglasses, which make for good vision ... And it is so short a time that this new art, never before extant, was discovered."²

We may take the technology of eyeglasses for granted, but we haven't seen anything yet, for at a big tech conference a few years ago they introduced smart glasses for those with limited sight. One came complete with 12x magnification, bar code scanning, and the ability to recognize and speak a document. Another pair of glasses had a built-in camera that would send a signal to a trained assistant to provide feedback about what you're looking at, and a third pair had a laser that projected an image directly onto your retina.³

Although Bartimaeus was blind and had no regular or smart glasses, he had a way of seeing better than others. The disciples had just finished arguing over who would have the best seat next to Jesus in heaven, hinting to us that they had a limited vision of who Jesus was. The common view of the day was that the Messiah would be a military leader who would wipe away the corrupt government and place his own government in power, which the disciples may have envisioned as they argued about getting the best seat next to

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Jesus. They wanted to be part of the system of control, being in power to set their own agendas.

Contrast with Bartimaeus, a blind man along the road that many people tried to silence, but rather than asking for a privileged seat, he cried out for Jesus to have, **ἐλέεω** (el-eh·eh·o), a Greek word meaning “mercy, compassion, pity.” “Have mercy on me, offer compassion.”

Jesus could have kept on moving, distancing himself from this man’s ability to find him, but Jesus stood still, allowing the man to find his way to him. The crowd who had been trying to silence the man, said, “Hey, Jesus has stopped, and he’s calling to you to meet with him!” The man threw off his cloak, which may have been a garment he used to collect the coins placed before him by those who felt sorry for him, and the man jumped up to go to Jesus.

Jesus then asked a question that he had previously asked James and John who came to ask him a favor: “What do you want me to do for you?” The two disciples wanted seats of power next to him, but the blind man asked, “Let me see again.”

Interestingly, although blind, it appears the man already had a way of seeing who Jesus was that others could not perceive, for he called Jesus **ῥαββονί** (*rhabbouni*), which means “teacher,” a term used to recognize an official position in Judaism, a rabbi. The only other person in the New Testament to use this word for Jesus was Mary Magdalene when she first reached the tomb and found it empty. She began a conversation with one she thought was the gardener, who asked, “Why are you crying? Who are you looking for?”

She replied, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him.”

Jesus then said her name, “Mary,” and she recognized Jesus, as though her eyes were opened to seeing something she hadn’t noticed, and she cried out *rhabbouni*.

Bartimaeus was blind, but he also recognized Jesus, he could see who he was. This blind one didn’t ask for power or status like the disciples, but he could see who Jesus was in way they could not.

Jesus replied that his faith had made him well, and Bartimaeus gained his sight and followed Jesus

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along the way. Both Mary and Bartimaeus had a unique way of seeing Jesus, as though their eyes had been opened to see in a way that others could not.

Writer Richard Rohr examined how Christian philosophers referred to three ways of seeing: “The first eye was the eye of the flesh (thought or sight), the second was the eye of reason (meditation or reflection), and the third was the intuitive eye of true understanding (contemplation).” Rohr describes this third eye as “knowing something simply by being calmly present to it.”

Have you ever known something and you’re not sure how you know? Maybe you somehow sense a connection to another person. It’s not something you learned in church or read in a book or were taught by a teacher. You just know, mysteriously, as though there is an invisible connection between you

and another person. Many times, we may ignore this way of knowing, which Rohr says has led to a lot of conflict in our world. He wrote the results of this loss of the “third eye,”

Lacking such wisdom, it is hard for churches, governments, and leaders to move beyond ego, the desire for control, and public posturing. Everything divides into dualistic oppositions like liberal vs. conservative, with vested interests pulling against one another. Truth is no longer possible at this level of conversation. Even theology becomes more a quest for power than a search for God and Mystery.⁴

Have you noticed this trend as well? We seem to have become more polarized, unable to see one another as we hide behind labels and seem unable to see those who differ from ourselves. Maybe like Bartimaeus we need to cry out to Jesus, “Help us see one another—and you, Jesus—again!”

¹ <http://www.glasseshistory.com/>

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glasses#History>

³ <https://www.abilitynet.org.uk/news-blogs/three-cool-smart-glasses-help-people-who-are-blind-or-have-sight-loss>

⁴ <https://cac.org/the-third-eye-2017-06-29/>