

Hymns:     **409**    “Let us build a house where love can dwell”  
              **440**    “Amazing grace – how sweet the sound”  
              **636**    “O love that wilt not let me go”  
              **483**    “**We are marching in the light of God**”

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Readings:  **Psalm 146**  
              **Mark 10:46-52**

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### ***“MASTER, LET ME SEE AGAIN”***

“Please take us in, your country is our only hope, our last chance. If you say no, you will be signing our death warrant, don’t turn us away, don’t send us back we beg you”

This was a telegram sent by the passengers of a boat packed full with 1000 refugees desperate to flee their country-the boat was packed beyond its capacity by men, women and children who had been stripped of all they had except an entry visa to .....Cuba.....this was JUNE 1939, the refugees were Jews, trying to flee the Nazi persecution in Germany. The boat was called SS ST LOUIS, a down at heel old ocean liner that had seen better days.

By the time they reached Cuba, political situations had changed and Cuba forbade them entry.....for the next month they sailed up and down the Coast of America and Canada, the US sent out ships to prevent the boat coming close to Land. Every Country in that area said NO.

This isn’t the first time I’ve used this illustration in a sermon in the last year or so and it’s not going to be the last. Because it highlights so tragically how history so often repeats itself, how human nature and fear can make all of us, nations included... to turn a blind eye to desperate people in need seeking refuge from the darkness of evil.

When we turn away from what is right, from what is true, from the good news of Jesus Christ; we are living in a dark world just like Bartimaeus- the man in our gospel reading today.

As tragic and frightening as physical blindness is, the greater tragedy is when we do not even see that we are blind. We fumble our way through life believing that this is as good as it gets. We are content to sit by the roadside and beg under our cloak of darkness.

How and what we see, shapes the world we live in. Bartimaeus knew this. He was a blind beggar. He was going nowhere, he bumped and stumbled his way around. Every day was the same for Bartimaeus. He sat by the roadside, holding out his cloak and begged. He was in darkness. There was no illumination within him or around him. The darkness covered him like his cloak.

At some point or another all of us sit by the roadside, beggars, cloaked in darkness, unable to see.

There's a way in which we can be blind too.

Back to the story of SS St LOUIS and its voyage along the American coast. Every country said no. The last chance was Canada. The passengers sent desperate telegrams to the Prime Minister of Canada ...one read.

*Gentlemen,*

*In great distress and desperate need, a refugee family addresses itself to you for help and rescue. Our distress, particularly our children, a 4 year old and 7 year old, who are starving. There is nothing left for us but suicide. In desperation we appeal to you for a permit to enter your country. Surely there are people who will have pity on us. My wife will refuse no work, we will farm, we will do anything in order to enter your country. Please heed our cry, before it's too late.*

*It was signed Dr Jacob and Cecilia Stein.*

The boat with all the refugees had no alternative but to sail back to Europe after Canada refused entry. Europe was also halting the influx of Jews at the start of the War. The passengers sailed back to Germany to meet their fate in the camps and gas chambers.

This story is a challenge to all of us. When Bartimaeus got up from the roadside and asked Jesus "My teacher, let me see again". It was as if he was saying "Stop me stumbling in the dark, help me to see what's happening around me, help me to understand people who are talking to me, and who are so intolerant of me."

Jesus responded positively. Everything we know about Jesus would lead us to expect this response. BUT what if he'd said NO?

Isn't that exactly how the passengers on that boat were treated? And isn't that too often the way we respond to the needs around us? We see and we hear, but the challenge is whether we really see and hear.

Do we really want to see the needs of our neighbours, the poor, or the marginalized? Do we really want to follow JESUS CHRIST?

True seeing is more than simply observing with our physical eyes. It implies a deeper knowing and understanding. Bartimaeus showed an ability to **see** before he gained his **sight**. He recognised Jesus' compassion, his humanity and grace. He understood his need for mercy and so did Jesus. This was clear sightedness indeed. By a blind man! Only then did the critical exchange which led to the recovery of the blind man's sight take place, this was a case of SEEING WITH THE EYES OF FAITH.

Wouldn't it have been wonderful if the people who received those telegrams from the desperate people on board that ship had seen and understood the need that they were faced with. Instead of which, out of their profound darkness, blindly dismissing the request and committing those poor people to their fate.

This seeing, however, is not without risk. If we really want to see then we must be willing to change and be changed. We must be willing to fight for what is right, to stand up against injustice, we must fight not with the tools of violence but with the tools of love and reconciliation. Sometimes that risk is too much. Sometimes it is far easier and safer to turn a blind eye and choose not to see. To put your cloak over your head and hope it will go away.

We are all perfectly aware of the referendum which took place three weeks ago. Some of us may have voted on one side, others on the other. Opinions will differ on that matter but what is certain is that post –Brexit Britain is divided, no doubt a consequence of that vote. The fabric of British society, enriched by the diversity of its population, is in danger of being unravelled and torn to shreds. The Police are already reporting a massive rise in race hate crimes. All this because we seemed unable (even unwilling) to see what was there before our very eyes.

Jo Cox seems to have seen these things, here she was, a young woman and mother in her prime, gunned down by a maniac whose feelings had clearly been stirred up by some of the rhetoric being employed in the campaign. Listen to what her husband said just after her death.

“Jo believed in a better world and she fought for it every day of her life with an energy and a zest for life that would exhaust most people. She would have wanted two things above all else to happen now – ONE that our precious children are bathed in love and TWO, that we all unite to fight against the hatred that killed her. He ended saying....Hate doesn't have a creed, race or religion, it is poisonous.”

I'm sure we can all see that, really see that, not only by making sense of what we see and read, but also, and more profoundly with the eye of conscience in our deepest selves.

1)To bathe people in love and to fight against hatred.

**Isn't that our calling?**

2) To reach out to the marginalized of our society.

**Isn't that our calling too?**

3)To hear the voices of those in need and not turn away

**That's definitely our calling.**

4)TO STAND UP FOR JUSTICE AND TOLERANCE

**Can we imagine a higher calling than that?**

Robert Mackenzie was the Prime Minister of Canada who rejected the plea of those refugees. In later years he came to regret that decision but, it was too late by then. We must never find ourselves in that position.

When Jesus asked Bartimaeus “**What do you want me to do for you?** He was putting that question not only to the blind man sitting by the roadside but to every one of us today, and everyone who has ever lived in darkness. It's an urgent

question, a question that Jesus puts to us over and over, again and again. Bartimaeus was clear. He pleaded “**Master, let me see**”.

And that must be our answer too.... If **we** believe in compassion, if **we** believe in kindness, if **we** believe in the love and grace of Jesus Christ our Lord, that will be OUR PLEA.

Bob Dylan sang his signature song “Blowin in the wind” over half century ago. Written against a background of racial prejudice and hatred ....He recognized the tendency we all have, to turn away from the person in need. That well known line in that song “***How many times can a man turn his head, and pretend that he just doesn't see***”. His words are as challenging today as they were then.

Amen.