The first eye was the eye of the flesh (thought or sight).

The second was the eye of reason (meditation or reflection).

The third was the intuitive eye of true understanding (contemplation).

Richard Rohr describes this third eye as knowing something simply by being calmly present to it (no processing needed!). This image of “third eye” thinking, extends way beyond our dualistic vision. The loss of this “third eye,” Rohr says, is the cause of the shortsightedness and religious crises of the Western world. 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 polar oppositions like liberal vs. conservative, with vested interests pulling against one another. Truth is no longer possible at this level of conversation. Even religion becomes more a quest for power than a search for God and Mystery.

In our text today, Blind Bartimaeus undoubtedly needed some wearable tech before he met Jesus; but Mark’s gospel reveals that Bartimaeus could ultimately see more clearly than Jesus’ own disciples where it counted: in the real vision of discipleship.

Jesus and his disciples are traveling through Jericho, making the 15-mile trek to Jerusalem where the cross awaited. Jesus warned his disciples three times that he was going to Jerusalem to die, but each time they failed to understand what he meant. Earlier, James and John requested of Jesus that they sit at his right and left when he came into his “glory” (10:37). They clearly perceived this to be the glory of an earthly king sitting on the throne of Israel. Jesus told them that his throne would not be the kind they were hoping for and that he had come to “give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45). But despite their long association with Jesus, these disciples still did not see the truth about who Jesus was and where he was leading them.

Blind Bartimaeus saw the truth. As Jesus passed by, Bartimaeus shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 47). This is the only time in Mark’s gospel where Jesus is identified as the “Son of David.” Jesus continually tries to keep a lid on the “messianic secret,” but it is now clear that it will not remain a secret much longer. Ironically, it is Bartimaeus who sees the truth. “Son of David” calls to mind a messiah who would be a conquering hero like King David; but Bartimaeus sees that this Son of David is different. Jesus comes with mercy and not wrath. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” is the faithful cry of one who “sees” more clearly who Jesus really is than those whose eyes function normally.

In declaring Jesus to be the merciful Messiah, however, Bartimaeus also reveals that he sees more plainly the truth about himself. In contrast to James and John, who seek personal glory as powerful associates of the King by sitting beside Jesus in his “glory,” Bartimaeus sees his own situation clearly. Bartimaeus recognizes his blindness and his need for mercy. He is not using Jesus to gain glory for himself; rather Bartimaeus sees himself as a beggar in need of the grace and mercy brought by the Son of David, who is also the Son of God. In an age when people believed that physical infirmity was a sign of spiritual brokenness, Bartimaeus does not debate his righteousness or complain about the unfairness of it all. He simply seeks mercy. His is the original sinner’s prayer: “Have mercy on me!” His persistent cry annoyed the crowd, but it caught Jesus’ attention.

Mark makes a point of saying that Jesus “stood still” before calling Bartimaeus to him (v. 45). Standing still enabled the blind man to find Jesus and come to him. Bartimaeus threw off his cloak and “sprang up” to come to Jesus (v. 50). Jesus asked Bartimaeus the same question he asked of James and John: “What do you want me to do for you?” (v. 51). James and John wanted Jesus to make them great, but Bartimaeus only wants to see. Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as “teacher,” the same title as used by James and John; but in this case, it is the plea of one who truly understands the lesson. Although Bartimaeus could not see Jesus, he had an expansive vision of a merciful Messiah who would open a new world for him. His spiritual smart glasses worked perfectly.

Jesus’ response to Bartimaeus is an invitation: “Go, your faith has made you well” (v. 52). Bartimaeus responds, not by going, but by following Jesus “on the way” (v. 52). Mark says that at Jesus’ word Bartimaeus immediately regained his sight, but we might argue that Bartimaeus could see all along. The implication is that Bartimaeus became a disciple himself and, if so, he now saw the way clearly, in every sense of the word. Bartimaeus received his sight because of his faithful insight; now he would see the glory of God in the face of Jesus, the Son of David.

When the first David conquered the Jebusites, the citizens of Jerusalem taunted him saying that “the blind and the lame will turn you back” (2 Samuel 5:6). David took the city and had “the blind and the lame” removed before his entry (2 Samuel 5:8-9). The Son of David, by contrast, removed the blindness instead of the blind as he entered the city. Bartimaeus’ story is a reminder that Jesus, the Messiah comes to restore the sight of those who are blinded by power, expectation, despair, or sin. Only those who are willing to wear the spiritual smart glasses of a humble, repentant disciple will see and understand how he conquers the world: not through the power of might but through the “glory” of the cross.

Wearable smart glasses will be a great help for those who need them, but spiritual blindness requires a different sort of correction. We need the kind of vision that even a blind man can have: a vision of humility, faith, and a desire to follow the One whose throne is a cross. The latest gadget cannot save you from spiritual blindness; only faith can make you well!

Prayer: **We stand before you, Saving God, stripped of our pretensions and pride, for nothing we do or say, or do not, can be hidden from you. You hear the angry words we preach to ourselves; you sift through the rubble of hurts we have caused; you see how we stumble, weighed down by all that 'stuff' which keeps us from following Jesus. We stand before you, Holy Grace. As you empty our hands of that wealth of unneeded things to which we cling so tightly, fill them with your grace and hope. As we let go of all which might hold us back, give us the trust to follow Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, into that life with which he offers to each of us. In Jesus’ name and for the sake of the world. Amen.**

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**Smart Glasses**

Sunday, October 24, 2021 Mark 10:46-52

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Wearable tech is all the rage these days. Virtual reality goggles make you feel like you are inside a make-believe world. Smart watches can track your workouts, monitor your health, answer your phone, and even tell the time! Chances are just about everyone here has some device that makes life a little more interesting, informative, or convenient. Most of the tech we wear is not essential to life; somehow most of us made it to adulthood with watches that *only* told the time. But for others, technology can mean the difference between life and death. Think of people who wear a pacemaker or internal defibrillator to monitor and regulate their heartbeat. While those technical advances enable longevity of life, others are improving the quality of life for people with various and differing abilities.

Now there is wearable technology for the blind and visually impaired which has the potential to make a huge difference in the quality of life of those who must navigate the world differently each day. Called “assistive technology” or “smart glasses,” these devices act as a visual or audio assistant for those with low or impaired vision.

*NuEyes Pro* created lightweight glasses that run on an Android platform and use cameras to magnify images up to 12 times. These glasses can change the color and contrast of the image the person is trying to observe, providing those with low vision the opportunity to see objects more clearly. These smart glasses even come with a bar code scanner and optical character recognition to recognize and read printed documents aloud. But while smart glasses can help a person see real images, they cannot help that much with real insight.

In the early medieval period, two Christian philosophers, Hugh of Saint Victor (1078-1141) and Richard of Saint Victor (1123-1173), wrote that humanity possessed three different sets of eyes. Each mode of seeing built on the previous one.