

First Friday of the First Week of Advent, December 3

Isaiah 29:17-24; Mt 9:27-31

“Do you believe that I am able to do this?” — One of the more puzzling questions Jesus poses in Scripture. Assuredly, if, as we believe, Jesus *is* God, the answer to this question is a moot point. God’s power to heal is not subject to the whims of beggars. So then why does Jesus inquire? Something more is at work when we remember the message of Christ *is* that God is love; for human beings, the notion of love is the closest approximation of what Divine activity shows itself to be. When we look at the situation from this view, we see the question actually matters all the more. In essence, what Jesus is really asking, is, “Are you open enough to receive the gift of my love?”

Isaiah reminds us of the promise of God in the Old Testament. As a loving Father, God promises Israel that He will protect them from shame, and transform the fortune that has befallen them as a people. He promises that if the Israelites would only have faith in Him, that He would provide them with the means to their flourishing. So, when Jesus says to the two blind men, “According to your faith let it be done unto you,” what He is saying closer to our modern ears is, “As you trusted me, so let the hope of that trust be fulfilled” or “as you were open to me, I will be open to you.” Jesus is not concerned about his own power in the story; he is concerned with the loving openness (more accurately, meekness) of the two men pleading to be healed.

It is a strange quality of human psychology that often, what can transform our lives or mend our wounds is right around the corner. The problem is much worse than our lack of humility to ask for aid; it is that our hearts are so hardened, the relief would not affect us, even if we acquired it. By asking for healing and affirming that Jesus could, in fact, relieve their blindness, the men not only displayed modesty, but also a deep trust that God’s power could fundamentally make their lives new, even on the physical level. I think this is what Jesus reacts to when He decides to heal them. What Jesus is looking for in us all is whether we are choosing to love. Loving does not so much begin by “doing” as much as by “listening,” and by being meek enough to withhold natural prejudice about a person. It means recognizing how much we deny the care and assistance every day that would make us less despairing, all because we believe we are beyond help, or that help cannot come from *that* person. What Scripture today reminds us is that much of what can heal us of our longing is right in front of us, we are just too afraid to have faith that it can.