

**October 27, 2024 – Revd Wim Kuiper**  
**Anglican Church Arnhem & Nijmegen**

Readings: Job 42.1-6, 10-end, Mark 10.46-end

God gives us the freedom to choose our own way of life. We have a choice to distance ourselves from God or to search for his closeness. And so it is only natural that God mostly remains a hidden presence for us. This hiddenness may feel as problematic and hard to accept. Because there are times when we eagerly long for his presence. We would love to see or hear more of him. But God needs to stay at a certain distance from us, otherwise we would not be as free as he wants us to be. But God may kindle our desire to get closer to him. Hoping for us to enter into the relationship that he offers us. And as we do so more and more, it is likely that we will also experience more of him. That it gets easier for us to catch glimpses of our Creator who is also our heavenly Father. Many Christians throughout the centuries, especially in the Christian tradition that is called mysticism, have taught us that we can in fact find God in all things. And when we are graced by such experiences of encountering the Divine, we use the language of our senses to describe them. So we have the testimonies of people who say that they heard or saw, but it is not quite like our normal way of hearing and seeing. Others will say that they simply felt and deeply knew as those encounters come in all kinds of ways. So, though it is true that God is hidden, there may be many moments when he is revealing himself to us in all kinds of different ways. And so we have every reason to keep our eyes and ears open for him and to trust on and cherish such moments when we clearly feel or deeply know.

The Bible is of course full of stories about people who encounter God. Sometimes in more direct and sometimes in more indirect ways. Such as God speaking to them in dreams and visions, or meeting angels as messengers of God. In the Old Testament we read that depicting God or making idols connected to the many Gods that the peoples in Biblical times used to believe in, is strictly forbidden; the second of the ten commandments. For good reasons, because God is not like any of those. The people of Israel going through the desert experienced God's presence on earth, the so called Shechina, as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. But even at that time, nobody, not even Moses, could really and fully see God. God covered Moses' eyes when he passed by and that is the closest he got to seeing this hidden God. We are told that people like Abraham, Moses and the other Prophets were somehow able to converse with God in a rather direct way. Hearing what he had to say to them and through them to his chosen people. Elijah once heard God speaking to him in a still small voice, a lovely image.

Today, we are ending our readings from the book of Job. It is one of those many Bible books in which we read about God himself speaking, using the first person singular form, the pronoun 'I'. And Job exclaims after this special experience: 'I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.' (Job 42.5) This may be a bit surprising, for he seemed to hear rather than see the Lord. But perhaps he means that he sees God's majesty as it is revealed in his creation, to which God is consistently pointing him in his speech.

Our Gospel reading shows someone else, a blind man called Bartimeus, who has a close encounter with God. Bartimeus and Job have their great faith in common. Both of them just feel, just know about the real and loving presence of God in their life. They have no doubts about that. They have not become sceptical despite the many hardships they are going through. In those many words with which Job addresses God, we can hear between the lines how he deeply longs to experience God's loving-kindness. And Bartimeus simply cries out loudly to the Lord with just a few simple words; 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' He is just convinced after all he has heard about Jesus of Nazareth, that he must be the Son of David. That he is, therefore, the Messiah who was expected to come. The special One sent by God, of whom the prophets had spoken. And so he deeply longs to meet him. And when he has been told that Jesus is calling him, he simply throws away his cloak, probably his most valuable possession. He springs up and comes to him. And he experiences his mercy, which is none other than God's mercy. And so this blind man also sees the God in the Lord Jesus. For as Jesus puts it elsewhere; 'Anyone who has seen the Son, has seen the Father too'. (John 14.9). And after being healed he follows Jesus on the way. A short and moving story of the wonderful impact that meeting Jesus had on this man's life.

I can feel a bit envious of Bartimeus and those many others who were able to experience Jesus in the flesh. Those people that lived at a time in which God manifested himself in a new and very unexpected way by living among them as a fellow human being. Though even then, he remained hidden for many, as they refused to recognise God in him. As they stayed doubtful, sceptical or even hostile. Those who were able to properly see and hear him as he was and is, were deeply touched by him and their lives changed for good.

And what about us? Not only God the Father, but also God the Son and God the Holy Spirit remain more or less hidden for us. But we can certainly still encounter and experience God the Father. And unlike Job and all the people who lived before Christ's earthly ministry, we have this extra powerful way of encountering God in the Spirit that has been poured out upon all flesh. And of course in Jesus, whom we can also, for instance, meet when we come to church in the bread and the wine that we share at the Eucharist. Though we can't hear and see Jesus in the same way as Bartimeus, we can still feel his healing touch upon us when we are in need of it. We can still hear his calling on us to be his followers. And we have his promise that when we abide in his love, he will come and make his dwelling in us. So just like Bartimeus, we have every reason to throw off our cloak, or anything that might hinder us to spring up, to come to him, and to follow him on the way. Amen.