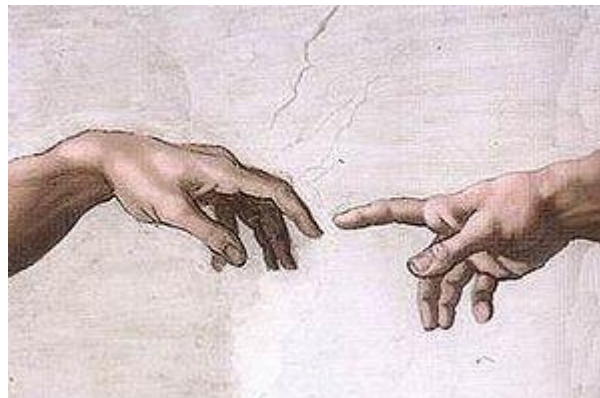


Mark 10:46-52

Sight and Regained Sight



In July Of 1509 while Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Papal Palace in the Vatican in Rome, John Calvin was born hundreds of miles away in Lyon France. When we gaze at the ceiling we see that from the magnificence of heaven surrounded and adored by heavenly beings; God reaches out, touches Adam and creates humanity. God speaks and humanity



comes into existence.

God's amazing hands touch Adam and humanity becomes God's amazing creation. John Calvin taught that God created humanity and that God has always stayed in touch with humanity.

Calvin believed in a compassionate and responsive God who loved humanity and was in solidarity with human suffering. Our God loved us so deeply that God came to us in Christ Jesus. According to Calvin, this Jesus was the best way to understand God. Through Jesus God embraced the human condition.

As we join Jesus and his disciples in the Gospel of Mark this morning, we find them in Jericho on their way to Jerusalem. This is not any trip to Jerusalem, this is the Day or the moment before Palm Sunday. We read of a blind beggar named Bartimaeus who is sitting by the road between Jericho and Jerusalem. He hears that Jesus is coming, and cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Bartimaeus believes that Jesus has power to make him whole, and he trusts him to work for good in his life. Bartimaeus is blind but he has the insight to understand that Jesus can help. Bartimaeus is blind but he can see things that the crowd cannot see. Jesus stops, and asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man stands before Jesus and answers, "My teacher, let me see again." In some way Jesus touches the man and restores his sight, and he gives Bartimaeus credit by saying, "Your faith has made you well." The beggar gets up, and begins his new life not by

going home, but by following Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus is the only person healed by Jesus in Gospel of Mark who turns and follows Jesus. Bartimaeus sees something that the others cannot.



John Calvin was like Bartimaeus. John Calvin looked at Jesus and saw things that others did not notice. God touched Calvin with faith and with genius. Calvin looked at the Bible, the church and the Protestant Reformation and was able to focus in a way that no one else in the Reformation could. John Calvin had insight and he had the unique ability to sort out Protestant thinking and present it in a logical codified systematic way. He had a powerful and keen intellect, he had a tremendous work ethic, he had a passion for positive change and he wrote and he preached and he taught and he wrote preached and taught and people realized that Calvin captured the essence of the Reformation in his writings. John Calvin did not

start the Protestant Reformation but he shaped it - he gave Protestantism its structure. Over Time Calvin's approach to Christianity became known as "Reformed". That's why Presbyterians are known as "Reformed" Christians. Its funny that even though Clavin permeates our very being, most Presbyterians are sketchy on who he was and what he accomplished. Today is Reformation Sunday, the Sunday the Protestant church always looks back to try



and understand what makes us who we are.

We need to know about John Calvin because just like 500 years ago our western world, in fact our whole world is in a time of great change. The world that the church ministers in today is vastly different than the world of our parents. The church is being challenged from within and from outside. The church is being challenged by new realities in, biblical studies, theology, science, philosophy, history, economics, politics - and a large part of the church is changing to respond to our new world, our new reality.

Calvin was able to read the changes, make sense of them and interpret them to the church. We need to be able to do that today.

John Calvin was born Catholic and his mother died when he was very young. He was eight years old when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the Castle Church doors in Wittenberg. Originally Calvin was studying to become a priest but his father, who worked for the Catholic Church, ran into some difficulties and was excommunicated. Calvin's father Gerard moved young John into law



school.

Calvin was a brilliant law scholar and earned his doctorate at age 22. He published his first book at 23. He moved to Paris and came under the influence of Protestant ideas. He had a religious experience and came to understand God's grace as absolutely central to his life. Calvin wrote on several occasions that he appreciated the works and thought of Martin Luther; although it seems he preferred wine over Luther's Passion for beer.

Calvin wrote speeches for famous protestant leaders and had to hide from Catholic Leaders because they wanted to kill him. As he

became more famous, the heat was turned up and he had to flee to Strassburg in Germany to avoid arrest and death. In 1536 he published the First Edition of His most famous book, The Institutes of the Christian Religion and almost overnight became the voice of the



Protestant Reformation.

The free city of Geneva Switzerland invited Calvin to lead the church there, but he was a tough cookie so they booted him. He went back to Strassburg he became a Pastor of a church. It was in Strassburg that he began to organize the church with officers known as Elders, Deacons, Teachers and Ministers. Geneva realized they had made a mistake and they invited Calvin Back and there he stayed until his death in 1564. While in Geneva, Calvin preached 20 sermons a month, wrote a commentary book on every book of the Bible, published about 10 books a year and expanded his Institutes of the Christian Religion Final edition to about 1500 pages in two volumes. He was the most published man in Europe.

John Calvin's teachings are so much a part of our thinking, so much a backbone of our western philosophy and our protestant

beliefs, so much the basis of democratic values and republican ideals; we may not even recognize his presence. By the way when I use the words democratic and republican I am not talking about our US political parties – I am talking about the original words which stand for certain values about people and government. John Calvin is of course the father of Presbyterian thinking and the subject of scores of books. It's not fair but I will try to summarize his gifts to us



in ten very short paragraphs.

John Calvin was a teacher who taught us that we can love God with our heads as well as hearts. He taught us to study diligently and to study the bible in our own language as well as the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. John Calvin taught us free public education was for everybody. He founded a free public academy in Geneva at the elementary and higher levels which is today the University of Geneva. Calvin taught that books were important and for everybody. The most important book was the Bible.

John Calvin was a community organizer and taught that the church should take care of the poor. He founded organizations that

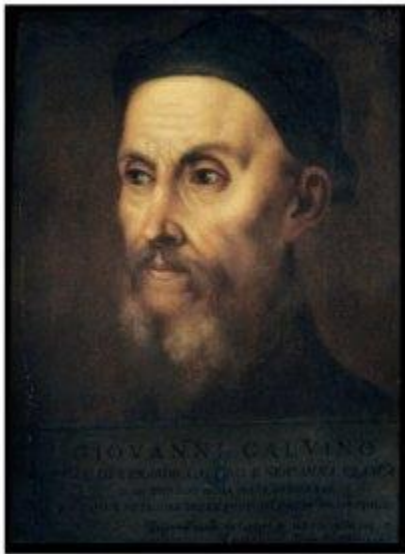
housed refugees, widows and orphans. He founded hospitals. This was breaking ground for the church. He taught the church to conduct mission through the ordained office of deacon. Calvin felt that God ached when people were in pain and suffering. Assistance was temporary; Independence was encouraged, the work ethic was



promoted.

Calvin was an encourager who taught that the all powerful God loved people and that people should love God back by moral living. He used the Ten Commandments to teach morality. His worship services always included the Ten Commandments. Calvin wore the Geneva Gown when he preached, the robes of his first profession the robes of a lawyer. He wore preaching Tabs when he led

worship. The two tabs remind us of the two tablets of the ten commandments. They were originally made of stone and wood. He held his church's members and especially the pastors, teachers, elders and deacons to high moral standards. Pastors met weekly for study and discussion and to keep each other focused.



Calvin taught that the power of governments should be limited and there should be representative form of government and that there should be checks and balances. Calvin also taught that governments were instruments of God and should be obeyed.

Calvin taught that the church should be free of government regulation. He planted the seeds for freedom of religion as we understand it in this nation.

Calvin taught that all people are called by God to Vocation not just ministers. God has a call in mind for each person. Calvin felt that if you were employed in your Vocation as opposed to an occupation; you glorified God by your work whether you were a carpenter, weaver or a clerk.

Calvin believed and supported commerce, capitalism and free markets. Calvin taught honesty was important to business as was paying taxes. Calvin taught that businesses should have charity at their foundation and that when they ceased to be charitable, they were diseased; A lesson for today's multinational banks and corporations. Is it not?

Calvin taught that music was a gift from God – absolutely essential to be used in public worship and that it should be in the native tongue not Latin. Calvin taught that the people should sing not just the priests. He created hymnbooks for churches based mostly on Psalms. We have sung several songs today from his hymnbook called the Genevan Psalter.

Calvin for sure had his blind spots. He did not believe Copernicus, that the earth circled the sun. He had witches executed and one time had a heretic burned at the stake. He could be over

serious. He had a temper and could be grumpy. He taught double predestination that some people were born to be saved and some born to be damned. Calvin over emphasized humanity's sinfulness. The Presbyterian church of today rejects certain aspects of Calvin's teachings and we have tempered and refined many others but we recognize that he went, what we call overboard, because of his unfaltering belief in God's power and authority. Calvin had a deep deep appreciation for God's Sovereignty and magnificence.



For John Calvin life was all about God. He was touched by God in a special way. Calvin saw things about God to which others were blind but he never felt that the church should freeze in one place. He might not agree with our approach to church today; but he would defend the church's right to continue reforming. Even though Calvin was amazingly famous at his death in 1564; he was humble about his ministry and his contribution to Protestantism. A little

humbleness, a deep appreciation for God, A lot of study, hard work and compassion for others goes a long way toward making a good disciple.