

**O**ur Spirit Life Committee sponsors Sunday morning adult class, and the class is reading a book by Marcus Borg, The Heart of Christianity: rediscovering a life of faith. In one of the chapters, Borg shares an enlightening perspective on faith. In order to facilitate the readers' understanding, Borg went back to the four aspects of faith, and used Latin words to explain them: *assensus*, *fiducia*, *fidelitas*, and *visio*.

**T**o put them in a short and sweet explanation, *assensus* of faith refers, in Borg's own words, "giving one's mental assent to a proposition, as believing that a claim or statement is true." He calls it a "head" matter: "Lutherans believed *x*, Presbyterians believed *y*, Baptists believed *z*, and so forth." He writes that Christian faith thus became believing the right things, having "right" beliefs instead of wrong beliefs. He observes that, for many today, faith means believing in spite of difficulties, believing even when you have reasons to think otherwise. It

means believing "iffy" things to be true. He lists as the opposite of *assensus*, in the stronger form, is disbelief, and the milder form is doubt.

But Borg says, for faith as *assensus* in the pre-scientific times, there was no conflict between believing and knowing. With the development and discovery of scientific knowledge, a conflict arose between Christianity and science. Borg invites the readers to consider whether God really cares about having a set of correct beliefs in our heads, in order to be saved. He wonders, whether God would care so much about what beliefs we have in our heads.

**F**or *fiducia* of faith, Borg fishes around for words, and picks "trust" as the best fitting word, as radical trust in God. He borrows from Søren Kierkegaard: "faith is like floating in seventy thousand fathoms of water. If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will eventually sink. But if

you relax and trust, you will float.”

Besides the metaphor of faith as trusting in the buoyancy of God, Borg lists *fiducia* of faith as “trusting in God as our rock and fortress. God is the one upon whom we rely, as our support and foundation and ground, as our safe place.”

The opposite of trust, as Borg puts it, is not doubt or disbelief, but mistrust. Its more provocative form is “anxiety” or “worry.” He asserts, as radical trust, *fiducia* has great transforming power.

**T**hen the third Latin term of faith, *fidelitas*, means loyalty, allegiance, the commitment of the self at its deepest level, the commitment of the “heart.” It does not mean faithfulness to biblical, creedal, or doctrinal statements. Rather, *fidelitas* means faithfulness to God to whom the Bible and creeds and doctrines point.

Its opposite is not disbelief, but infidelity, being unfaithful in our relationship with God. The biblical metaphor of the opposite of *fidelitas* is adultery. Another example is idolatry.

*Fidelitas* means loving God and loving your neighbor and being faithful, above all, to these two great relationships. Borg argues that *fidelitas* means not only to love God but also to love what God loves—the neighbor and God’s Creation. Therefore, for Borg, faith as *fidelitas* carries an ethical imperative.

**F**or the last Latin term that describes faith, *visio*, Borg finds its closest English word in “vision.” *Visio* is a perspective of seeing things as a whole. He says that this way of seeing the whole makes possible different responses to life. It frees us from the anxiety and self-preoccupation, thus leads to the ability to love and to be present to the moment.

Borg contends faith as *visio* views the reality as gracious. Its

opposite is unfaith that looks at reality as hostile, threatening, and indifferent. Here I beg to differ slightly from Borg. I would say that *visio* allows us see the reality as is, not necessarily in the strained, positive or negative ways of looking at things, but helps us find the gracious way to live it. And in doing so, we may capture and embody the gracious, nurturing, and affirming aspect of reality.

*Visio* is closely related to *fiducia*, Borg insists, for how we see the reality and how we trust God are connected to each other. The way we trust God and the way we see God go together. I agree with him: we put in action what we believe.

**I**f these four elements of faith, *assensus*, *fiducia*, *fidelitas*, and *visio*, help us understand faith, can they also help us understand what blind Bartimaeus had, when he believed?

This was the reality that the blind beggar Bartimaeus faced: since his name was Bartimaeus, we

know that he was known to be the son of Timaeus. Yet no one from his family seemed to have kept him from the fate of becoming a beggar. Where were his parents, his siblings, his relatives? Why was he left on the side of the road to beg? Did Bartimaeus find in begging his profession?

When Bartimaeus began to shout and cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," many told him to shush. If you were blind, you are not human enough to shout for help? The folk around the blind man, including his own family, would not lift a finger to help him, but they would want to keep the beggar where he belonged: people want the lesser human beings like Bartimaeus to be out of the way, on the side of the road, out of the sight, and stay quiet.

**B**ut this is what Bartimaeus did: the more people shushed him, the more loudly he raised his voice. That got Jesus to stop, and Jesus told his disciples to call him. Jesus asked him, "What do you

want me to do for you?" Did Bartimaeus ask for a house? For a wife? For better clothing? For a gold-plated pan? No. He just wanted to *see* again, that was all.

And this is what Jesus did: Jesus simply told him, "Go: your faith has made you well." Jesus did not insist that he be credited with the healing. It was the beggar's own faith, Jesus said, that gave him the sight.

Blind Bartimaeus knew only three things: that he became blind, that his blindness caused all his problems, and that he wanted to see again. For Jesus that was enough. That was enough for a man to be made well. So Jesus told Bartimaeus: "Go; your faith has made you well."

**S**o here we are, trying to analyze what happened. Is it possible to see through the lens of the four Latin terms, *assensus*, *fiducia*, *fidelitas*, and *visio*, and see if they had anything to do with healing of the blindness?

Did Bartimaeus merely believe that Jesus can give him the sight, simply because he heard from other people through hearsay? Did Bartimaeus have to believe in a set of doctrinal truth in his head, in order to see again? Or are we sitting in the comfy armchair and pondering about the finer theological points?

For the blind beggar, life was like a slow death. There was no soup kitchen, there was no social service, no shelter, no one. He was at the mercy of strangers. Do you know what it is like to eke out the living on the mercy of the strangers who despise you and mistreat you like an animal? Do you know what it is like to be treated as lesser human, just because you cannot see, just because you are handicapped? Do you know what it is like to become *the* lesser human in the human society? Do you know what it is like having to secure permission even to call for help?

**B**artimaeus was desperate. For him it was not about the right of the free speech: it was life or

slow death. For Bartimaeus, it was the conviction of *assensus* that Jesus could save him from this slow death as a lesser human being. Bartimaeus knew that all he needed was to see again! He could take care of himself, only if he could see!

For Bartimaeus, it was *fiducia*, the radical trust in Jesus, that Jesus could save him from this slow death. For Bartimaeus, it was the *visio*, the unwavering perspective of reality that God's grace is still available to him, despite the cold reality of the inhuman society surrounding him. But what about *fidelitas*, the faithfulness? When did blind Bartimaeus have time to build up his faithfulness to Jesus or God?

It appears that *fidelitas* is something that follows after you experience God's grace. *Fidelitas* is something that requires a relationship, in order to grow. You become faithful to another human being, as you experience the other's *fidelitas*, as in a marriage or friendship. As you grow in the relationship,

your faithfulness to one another also grows.

**B**artimaeus' faithfulness is found *ex post facto*, after the fact. After he received the sight—after he experienced God's grace—he decided to follow Jesus. That is *fidelitas* of the faith Bartimaeus had. The thing about *fidelitas* is that it is completely voluntary. Following Jesus is a purely voluntary thing. Faithfulness can never come from coercion.

*Fidelitas* can only wellspring from the deepest of one's heart. Bartimaeus only wanted to see again. He was not asking for anything else. But that is not everything that happened to him. When we experience God's amazing grace, God always gives more than what we asked for. When we encounter Jesus, and earnestly desire to have a relationship with him, Jesus restores what had been broken, and the rest of the whole being.

**W**hen we approach God, we see only what we see, and we want only what we want. But God's

grace through Jesus affects the entire being of a person. Bartimaeus only wanted to see again. But Jesus saw more than a seeing man in Bartimaeus; Jesus made him whole again. Not just the vision, but his whole being.

Jesus restored to Bartimaeus not only his vision, but also the humanity, the human worth as an independent being, the purpose of life, and the gifts and graces to share with other human beings, so that God might be glorified through him. He used to be nobody, but he is somebody now.

The story of Bartimaeus is the testament that God hears the cry of the oppressed, and that God restores the humanity of the downtrodden, and that God is on their side. Bartimaeus is the conviction of the inhumane human society that condemned the handicapped that it was their own fault that they could not see, run, or climb stairs. Bartimaeus is the exposure of the society that strips the human dignity of any one who is handicapped, poor, or powerless. And Jesus affirmed

to Bartimaeus that it was all his own doing: Go: your faith has made you well. Bartimaeus now follows Jesus. He is ready to grow and flourish, ready to use the gifts and graces within, and ready to fulfill his life.

It was his *assensus*, his *fiducia*, and his *visio* that made Bartimaeus well—even *fidelitas*, because Bartimaeus had been meaning to meet Jesus, and had been waiting to capture that opportunity all this time. And once he realized it was Jesus who was passing by, he leaped to seize it, as if it was his life or death. He was faithful to Jesus, even before he met or saw him.

**W**hen we approach Jesus, and desire an earnest fellowship with him, God restores through Jesus not just the broken part, but the whole of our being. We become transformed into a new creation. To Jesus, it is abundantly clear that it is our faith, not his, that makes us well.

May you grow in *fidelitas*, as you continue on your faith journey.