

The City Council of Kansas City will soon vote on a new master plan for the future development of the city. It's called FOCUS, "Forging Our Comprehensive Urban Strategy." The idea is to plan neighborhoods, urban renewal, preservation, infrastructure, and forms of government, so that we enter the next century not by happenstance, but with intent. For example, your home, your workplace, and your access to public transportation might actually be close to one another. It shouldn't take thousands of urban planners five years, a thousand pages, and six hundred recommendations to come up with that idea, but in truth we're not set up that way right now; our neighborhoods do not easily connect people and places. So unless we have a vision, unless we say, "This is what neighborhoods should be like," we'll never get there. Too often we plan for the future by not planning, or when someone presents a plan, we say, "It'll never work." The city gets credit for thinking, dreaming, and planning what could be.

Getting vision is the point of today's gospel. On the surface, this story tells the miracle of Jesus bringing health to a person with a disability. But for the first readers of Mark's gospel, this story also told of Jesus bringing faith to an unbeliever, to a person who was spiritually blind, who heard the gospel, came to Jesus, and then *saw* in a different way. This gospel is not just about the disabled receiving physical sight, but about the non-Christian receiving Christian sight.

Today when we hear it, the story changes again. It tells of *Christians* who are blind to what could be. We all need to see the world in a new way, to challenge a society where health care costs too much, where crime comes too close to home, where people don't care about abortions or the women who have undergone them, and where people spend more time commuting than they do with their families. We need vision for a better city, and we need Christians to speak up for it.

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was near, the crowd told him to keep quiet. Seeing Bartimaeus, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" It's a stupid question, but if Bartimaeus had listened to the crowd, he would have said, "Oh, nothing." And I'm sure Jesus would have done just that. Nothing. Jesus is forever asking us the same stupid question, "What do you want me to do for you?" Crowds may say to us, "Keep quiet." But Christians should speak up for vision.