

22 Pentecost
October 24, 2021

Sermon by The Rev. Mal Jopling

It is probably safe to say that Bartimaeus, the blind beggar in today's Gospel is not one of the more well-known characters in the Bible. We all know about Mary and Joseph and their journey to Bethlehem. And we remember the stories about Peter walking on the water or Paul's dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. But how many can recall Bartimaeus or recount his story? However, if we listen closely, this seemingly small, bit player in the Gospel story can teach us some important lessons about the meaning of Christian discipleship.

Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem with his disciples. As he passes through the town of Jericho, he encounters a blind beggar. We are not told very much about this poor man. We are only given his name and his Father's name. We don't know his age, or what caused his blindness or anything else about his life. We can only imagine that Bartimaeus was doing exactly what he did every other day—he sits at the side of a dusty road and begs. He is about as far down society's ladder as one can go. There are no social programs or welfare to help folks like Bartimaeus. So, he sits and he waits and he hopes for someone, anyone to drop a coin in his bowl in order that he might be able to have a little something to eat.

Then something happens that will forever change his life. Someone tells him that Jesus and a large crowd of people are about to pass by. Bartimaeus has heard about this Rabbi Jesus and how he has performed miracles and cured the sick and preached of the love of God.

Bartimaeus senses that this is his moment, this is his one chance, it is now or never. So as Jesus draws near, Bartimaeus cries out loudly and passionately, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Some in the crowd tried to quiet him. But Bartimaeus isn't about to be quiet. He cries out even more loudly to Jesus. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus hears him; he stops and tells the people to call the man over. Despite his blindness Bartimaeus throws off his cloak and runs to Jesus. Jesus asks him, "What is it you want me to do for you?" It is the same question Jesus had asked James and John in last Sunday's Gospel. Bartimaeus responds, "My teacher, let me see again." What a contrast that is from James and John's request to be preeminent and to sit at the right hand and the left hand of Jesus; to sit in the place of honor.

It is this poor beggar, not one of the disciples, not one of the "inner circle," who though physically blind, has the insight, has the faith, has the courage and the perception to "see" who Jesus really is. No one had to explain to Bartimaeus his situation. Bartimaeus knew far better than anyone that he was blind and that he was desperately in need of healing. While he might be considered a nobody in the eyes of the world, Bartimaeus had the faith to believe in a God who loved him with a love more powerful than the impenetrable darkness of his blindness. His faith led him to a God who would heal him.

The story of Bartimaeus is another of the many wondrous healing miracles of Jesus. There is much we can learn from the poor, blind beggar. Like Bartimaeus, in order to receive God's grace and God's healing, we must first be willing to acknowledge our own helplessness, our own blindness, our own need for mercy and forgiveness and healing.

And there is another side to this story we also need to consider. Bartimaeus is not the only person suffering vision impairment. The crowd was blind as well. They were blind to the needs of Bartimaeus. The crowd saw

him only as a nuisance and a distraction—someone who was disrupting their nice, safe, orderly way of following Jesus.

Like the crowd, how often do we suffer from blindness? Perhaps we need to have our own sight restored, our own blindness healed, and our vision refocused. Perhaps Bartimaeus' words should become our prayer as well. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! My teacher, let me see again."

"Jesus, have mercy on us and heal our blindness that refuses to acknowledge our helplessness and our need of dependence on you alone. Jesus, have mercy on us and heal our blindness that refuses to see the needs of others—the blindness that prevents us from seeing or speaking or acting on behalf of those who have no voice in the world."

"Jesus, have mercy on us and heal the blindness of a society that measures one's worth by the size their bank account rather than by the content of their heart." "Jesus, have mercy on us and heal our nation's blindness to prejudice, hatred, bigotry and violence."

"Jesus, have mercy on us and heal our blindness of apathy—our blindness that says, "Let someone else tell the world about Jesus. Let someone else serve on that committee at church. Let someone else go to the poll and vote. Let someone else get involved to try to help solve the social problems of our community. Lord, heal our blindness."

Bartimaeus is not the only one healed and given sight on the road that day. The crowd also had their sight restored and their blindness healed. When Jesus said, "Call him here," the crowd's eyes were opened, and they "saw" Bartimaeus for the very first time. Did you notice what they did when they saw him? They responded and they pointed a suffering soul to Jesus, the one who heals. "Take heart, he is calling you." The crowd's response is to be our response. As a people who seek to follow Jesus, we first must be healed of our own blindness in order that we may lead others to clearly see Jesus. We are to tell others, "Take heart, Jesus is calling you."

Bartimaeus was healed that day. He was given his sight. More importantly, was his response to being healed. When Jesus removed the scales from his eyes; when he was no longer blind, what did Bartimaeus do? "Immediately, he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way." Bartimaeus didn't continue to sit on the side of the road just saying, "Thank you Jesus." He followed Jesus on the way. Jesus is not saying to us today, "Stay, your faith has made you well." Jesus is calling to all of us this morning, "Go, your faith has made you well." Jesus has restored our vision; Jesus has healed our blindness. Our response must be to leave the side of the road and follow in his way. We need to get on the road with Jesus. We need to follow him and to point others toward his redemptive love and healing.

Let us pray. Most Holy God, give us eyes to see your hand at work and by your grace empower us to follow you. Quicken our spirits to love others and to see in them the face of Jesus.

Amen