

THE BLIND BEGGAR

Mark 10:46-52 (NRSV)

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. [47] When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" [48] Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" [49] Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." [50] So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. [51] Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." [52] Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

BLIND BEGGAR

Today's story is about a blind beggar by the side of the road. In Jesus' day that was a common sight. This was before the Americans with Disabilities Act. There were no accommodations made for the disabled in Jesus day.

Their disability made it impossible for them to make a living. In a world where most work was manual labor, the only option for this blind man was to spread his cloak by the side of the road and hope that a few kind souls would take pity on him and drop a few coins on his cloak.

The blind man didn't have much to look forward to. Every day was the same, no light and very little hope.

A MESSIANIC SIGN

But, there was a glimmer of hope even for the blind in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Bible the blind are included in a group of "outsiders" who will be healed as a sign of the coming of God's kingdom.

The people believed that when the Messiah came the blind would receive their sight and the lame would walk. In this new world no one would be condemned to a life of begging by the side of the road. No one would be sidelined in God's kingdom. The new world would be a place where everyone would be whole and healthy.

When John the Baptist was about to be executed because he challenged the immoral ways of King Herod, John sent some messengers to Jesus and asked if he was the Messiah ... or were they to expect someone else.

Jesus told these messengers to go back to John and tell him what you see and hear. Tell him that "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."

Matthew 11:5 (NRSV)

These are all signs of the kingdom ... signs that the Messiah has indeed come. Throughout the gospel of Mark we see this same sign repeated over and over. Jesus touches those who are thought to be beyond help. The mentally ill, the blind, the deaf, the lame and the lepers are all touched by Jesus. And they are healed.

With wide eyes the people whisper the question that they are afraid to ask out loud,

"Who is this? Could this be the Messiah?"

Can you hear the voice of Jesus calling you today? He is calling you.

He is calling you by name. He is offering you hope.

Get up and go to him this very day. Tell him what you want and need. Let him heal you. And then follow him all the way.

Amen.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH