

Mark 10:46-52

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.

AMAZING GRACE

I know it's hard to believe in this time of irritating political ads. But, sometimes the commercials are better than the shows. I'm particularly fond of the Geico ads.

But, there is one ad that tops them all. It's produced by the Salvation Army.

Folks of different backgrounds take turns saying the words of Amazing Grace. But, there's a twist.

In soft but earnest tones they say, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a crack head, an alcoholic, a drug addict, a meth freak ... a wretch ... like me.

I once was homeless, broken, sad, just lost.

But now I'm sober, I'm happy, I'm found ..."

And then the last man looks directly into the camera and says, "... was blind but now I see."

We all know the words to that song. But, there's just something about putting faces to those words that make them come alive.

Today the ministry of Jesus comes alive in the

healing of a particular man, a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus. I imagine Bartimaeus telling others his story again and again. Earnestly Bartimaeus looks into the camera and says softly, “I was blind, but now I see.”

BE QUIET!

But, our lesson for today does not begin with quiet, humble faith. Instead, it begins with a man shouting for help. Again and again Bartimaeus cries out, “Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me!”

He must have made quite a commotion. Even in the middle of a big noisy crowd on their way to Jerusalem for Passover everyone heard what this beggar by the side of the road had to say. And they told the beggar to be quiet.

Literally this phrase means, “They rebuked him many times.” This wasn’t just one or two people telling the blind man to be quiet. This was the entire crowd turning on Bartimaeus telling him in no uncertain terms to be quiet. He was disturbing their peace.

I’m not sure why they told the blind man to be quiet. Perhaps they thought that Jesus didn’t need to be

bothered with a mere blind beggar who sat by the side of the road. We know what it's like to have our life interrupted by those folks who stand in the intersection of busy roads with plastic buckets collecting money. They create a traffic hazard.

On the other hand, I have to wonder if some weren't upset by the title that the blind man gave Jesus. Bartimaeus cried, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Jesus, Son of David sounds suspiciously like a Messianic title, and if that's true these were dangerous words.

The crowd could have said in effect, "Come on Bartimaeus. We need to get you home. You're obviously blind to the danger that you're putting all of us in by saying these things. The Romans have spies everywhere."

But, the crowd did not intimidate the blind man. The more they tried to get him to hush up the more he shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

The commotion got Jesus' attention. He stopped and called for this blind man to come to him. You'll remember that in much of Mark's Gospel Jesus is telling people to be quiet about who he is and what He has done.

But, today's lesson marks another significant turning point. Now Jesus is leaving Jericho with the crowd going to Jerusalem for the Passover. The triumphal entry, the Last Supper, and finally the crucifixion will soon take place. There is no longer any need for secrecy. Now it can be proclaimed.

And so, instead of joining the crowd in telling Bartimaeus to be quiet, Jesus stops dead in his tracks and calls the blind man to come.

THE CALL

The people tell Bartimaeus that Jesus is calling him, and Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, jumps up and heads toward the voice of Jesus.

Some commentators note that the blind often used their cloak during the day to catch coins as they begged. So, when Bartimaeus jumped up and threw off this cloak perhaps there were coins in it from his day's collections and the coins went rolling down the road.

But, he didn't care. Bartimaeus was willing to give up everything to follow Jesus just as the twelve disciples had left their homes and jobs to follow Jesus

earlier.

When the blind man makes it to Jesus, Jesus asks Bartimaeus a straightforward question, “What can I do for you?”

And Bartimaeus replies, “I want to see again.”

THE BLIND WILL SEE

As odd as it might seem to us some people treated blind people in the ancient world with contempt. They thought that blindness was due to some unrighteous act or some sin against God. There are quite a few passages in the Old Testament that suggest this is true. Blindness was not only a disability; it was also a curse

In addition to this, blindness was something for which there was no cure. You might get over a cold or a high fever but being blind and then one day being able to see again; that didn't happen so much. In fact it didn't happen at all.

And so that's why the healing of the blind would be a sign of the coming of God's kingdom. When the Messiah came then the incurables would be cured. The blind would see, the deaf would hear, and the

lame would walk.

Well, when the blind man asked to see, he was saying in effect, “Son of David, I think you’re the Messiah. I think you can take away my blindness, and I want to see again.” Bartimaeus had faith not only in Jesus’ ability to do the impossible and heal his blindness. Bartimaeus “saw” that Jesus was the Messiah.

Isn’t this ironic. Only the blind man really sees Jesus. And those who had sight were blind. They longed for a Messiah, and yet they didn’t recognize the Messiah when he was standing right in front of them.

FAITH AND SIGHT

Jesus told Bartimaeus that his faith had made him well. He was saved by faith.

Faith can save us too. But, don’t misunderstand. We are not saying that faith is a kind of work or worse yet a kind of magic.

Some think of it that way. Some make faith sound like the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy closed her eyes, clicked her heels together and “presto” she was home.

It is not possible to believe our way into wellness. But, faith allows us to receive the healing that Jesus brings.

How did Paul put it? We are saved by grace through faith. But, this is not just any old faith. This is faith in Jesus. And that makes all the difference.

Faith in Jesus can open the ears of the deaf. Faith in Jesus can allow the lame to walk. Faith in Jesus can make the blind see. Faith in Jesus can even give us hope for this life and also for the life to come.

Faith begins when we come to Jesus. We come to Jesus humbly admitting that we “can’t see.” But, we also come trusting that Jesus can restore our sight.

Some no doubt will try to stop us. They will say that we are foolish to believe that Jesus can give us hope. They will say that the blind don’t get a second chance, that blindness is a permanent condition.

They will say things like, “You’ve made your bed now lie in it.” But, Jesus says things like, “Take up your bed and walk.”

When people come to Jesus the blind see and even

the most hardened heart can be melted by the power of his love and grace. In the life and ministry of Jesus we learn that the word “hopeless” is not in God’s vocabulary.

No matter what your problem if you throw off the old way of life and come to Jesus you can see again. You can be healed. You can be saved.

REFORMATION DAY

Today is Reformation Sunday. (Actually Reformation Day is October 31, but since that’s a Wednesday we need to celebrate either today or next Sunday.)

On this day we think about those who sought to purify the church back in the 16th century. Luther and Calvin and the other Reformers believed that over the course of time the church had become blind to the truth about God. Instead of relying upon the Bible to form her beliefs the church had begun to base her beliefs upon the traditions of men and women.

This led to a church that was blind to some of the most basic doctrines of the Bible, truths like: salvation is by grace through faith. And so the

Reformers sought to point out these blind spots and bring the church back to Jesus.

But, as we all know their efforts were not well received. Many of the Reformers were killed, and the conflict was bitter and lasted for many years.

Today we remember the sacrifices that were made for the sake of the gospel. But, we also need to remember that the Reformation continues. There are still those who call us to follow Jesus more closely. There are still those who say that we are blind to the true meaning of the gospel.

The call to change is disturbing. We are in love with having it our way. But, we need to consider the message of these “blind” prophets by the side of the road. They may be telling us the hard truth that we need to hear.

Frank Sinatra sang, “I did it my way.” But, Christians sing a different song. We do it Jesus’ way.

And that means coming to Jesus. We are blind and only Jesus can heal us.

It’s easy enough to talk about the courage of the Reformers and celebrate what they did in the 16th

century. The more difficult task is to ask what needs to be reformed in our lives and in our churches today.

Where are our blind spots? Do we really want to follow Jesus? Do we really want to see?

Or do we want to follow a “Jesus” that we have remade in our own image?

There’s another catch phrase that came from the Reformation, “always reforming” according to the Word of God. The Reformers of the 16th century realized that if the church had become so blind to the gospel the first time then it was possible (even probable) that it could happen again.

We are often blinded by sin and the desire to the make the gospel something that is more in line with what we want. Remember this was the temptation of the disciples from the very beginning, and it is our temptation as well.

Those early disciples thought that the Kingdom of God was about political power and personal gain. (In my opinion some of the distortions of the Gospel in the modern world also turn faith into a way of gaining personal and political power.)

But, according to Jesus the Kingdom of God was about personal sacrifice. The Kingdom of God was about having the courage and faith to follow Jesus.

THE WAY

Jesus tells Bartimaeus, “Go. Your faith has made you well.” In other words, Jesus said, “Go back home to live the ‘normal’ life that you had been denied all these years.”

And yet on this one point Bartimaeus does not obey Jesus. Instead of going back home he leaves home to follow Jesus on the way. A healing story becomes a discipleship story.

To follow Jesus is to be “on the way” with Jesus. We talked about this several weeks ago. The first Christians referred to themselves as the people of “the way.” Those early Christians knew that faith was a journey and not a destination. Faith was willingness to throw caution to the wind and “hit the road” with Jesus.

This is a theme that runs throughout the Bible. John the Baptist introduced Jesus by quoting the prophet Isaiah, “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our

God.”

In Jesus God built a highway. He built an interstate in the desert. He made a way out of hell for those who are enslaved by the ways of the world.

Just as God made a way out of Egypt to free his people from slavery so Jesus is the way to freedom. And if we are to make it home we must take that way.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”

We can't build our own highway to God. That road has already been built. It is called the way of Jesus. But, if we believe that Jesus is the way then we too must be willing to travel with him.

If Bartimaeus had gone back home I doubt we would have known his name. He would have been just another nameless person who was healed by Jesus.

But, we know his name. That's the difference between this healing story and many of the others.

This was not just another blind beggar by the side of the road. This was Bartimaeus, Son of Timaeus. (His

name is repeated. Bartimaeus means Son of Timaeus. But, for those who didn't speak Aramaic Mark wanted to make sure that everyone knew the name.)

Apparently Bartimaeus did follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem and even beyond.

People in the early church knew him, and they knew his story. The people of the early church said, "Bartimaeus? Sure we know him. He used to teach Sunday school in Galilee. He was blind but Jesus healed him, and he followed Jesus all the way to Jerusalem.

He even led the cheers on Palm Sunday when they all cried, 'Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' That Bartimaeus could see the truth even when he was blind. We will always remember Bartimaeus."

BARTIMAEUS TODAY

Sometimes I think its people like Bartimaeus who can help us see Jesus more clearly. People like Bartimaeus seem to know instinctively what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus.

They are new to the faith. They have just had their eyes opened. And this gives them a fresh perspective on the glory of salvation. They have spent many years in darkness, and they appreciate more than most the joy of God's light.

We need to make sure that we don't hinder those people. We need to make sure that we don't try to shut those people up or keep them in their place by the side of the road. Sometimes those who are broken by the trials of life are the very people who can help us see Jesus more clearly.

I invite you to watch the Salvation Army Amazing Grace ad this week. For those of you with a computer just Google it and it'll come up on YouTube. It only takes a few seconds to watch it.

And then ask yourself this question, "Am I lost? Am I broken by life? Am I blind?"

Good news, we know someone who can cure that. His name is Jesus, and he is calling you today. Get up and follow him on the way.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like you and me." We are blind, but he will help us see. Amen.