

Healing the Blind
 First Presbyterian Church of Kissimmee
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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.

THE FAITH OF A BLIND MAN

What does it take to heal the blind?
 According to our passage for today it takes faith.
 Jesus told the blind man, “Go, your faith has made you well.”

If faith can heal a blind man, I think we need to take note.
 How did he show faith? Why was his faith so effective and strong?

The story suggests several answers.

HE HAS A NAME

First, in Mark’s gospel the beggar has a name.
 He is Bartimaeus the Son of Timaeus.

That’s important.
 He is not a nameless face by the side of the road.
 He’s someone’s son. He matters.
 And because he has a name he matters to Jesus.

A politician used to encourage young people at risk by having them chant, “I am somebody.”

This man was somebody.

He had a name and that name became famous because he trusted in Jesus.

Faith begins with the recognition that we are somebody.

We have a name, not just the name that our family gave us but also the name that God gives us. We are children of the heavenly king, and that means we have the ear of the king.

We can call out to Jesus, and he hears us.

MERCY

And so this beggar with a name calls out to Jesus.

What does Bartimaeus say?

“Have mercy on me.”

The blind man makes his plea on the basis of need.

He just wanted mercy.

He was blind, and he wanted to see.

The story of faith always begins in darkness.

The story of faith always begins in emptiness.

The story of faith always begins with raw need.

That’s where our story begins as well.

Our faith also begins with a simple cry for mercy.

Faith begins when we realize our problem can’t be cured by trying harder or doing more.

The blind can’t be cured by hard work.

It takes a miracle.

And in the same way, our faith begins when we admit that our problems are greater than our resources. Our life is out of control.

And so we cry to the Lord, “Have mercy on me.”

Asking for mercy came naturally to Bartimaeus. He was blind. In the ancient world, that meant he spent his life begging. He depended upon the mercy of others every day.

It is no surprise that the blind man asked Jesus for mercy.
That came naturally to him.

We are different. We are more independent than Bartimaeus.
Most of us don't have to beg for a living.
In fact we may feel quite confident in our ability to make it on our own.

But, sometimes we learn that our confidence is really an illusion.
One wrong turn in life can show us just how vulnerable and weak all of us really
are.

Maybe we are the ones who are blind when it comes to the need for mercy ... and
the blind man is the one who really sees.

We really do come to the throne of God's grace as beggars with nothing to com-
mend ourselves except our need for grace. So, the cry for mercy is indeed the be-
ginning of faith, for Bartimaeus and for us.

SON OF DAVID

But, the blind man's cry was more than just a cry for mercy. It was a statement
about the identity of Jesus.

The blind man "saw" something special in Jesus that others missed. Jesus was
more than just a man from the no good, back water town of Nazareth.

According to Bartimaeus, Jesus was the Son of David.
He cried, "Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me!"

The title, Son of David not only identifies Jesus as a descendent of the beloved
King; it also identifies him as the one who will fulfill the religious and political ex-
pectations of his people.

The next thing that happens in Mark's gospel is the entry into Jerusalem. And
what do the people say about Jesus as he comes into town?

"Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!"

In Mark's gospel, it is the blind who man prepares the way for Jesus' entrance into
Jerusalem. According to Bartimaeus Jesus is more than just another passerby who
can make a donation to his cause.

He is the Son of David.
 He is the one for whom Israel had been waiting.
 He is the Messiah.
 He is the Son of the living God.

Ironically, the blind man is the only one who sees Jesus clearly.

And for the first time in Mark's gospel the identity of Jesus is proclaimed openly.

BE QUIET!

Of course the crowd knew that such talk was dangerous. They lived in a world where there was "no king but Caesar". Even a blind beggar could bring down the wrath of Rome down on the people.

That's why they told Bartimaeus to be quiet.
 They told him in no uncertain terms.

The Scripture says "many sternly ordered him to be quiet." It's a very strong expression.

They rebuked him.
 They said in effect, "Are you crazy?
 Don't you know what will happen if you keep saying things like that? Shut up."

Imagine the blind man's situation.
 A crowd of people are coming to you saying in no uncertain terms, "Shut up!"

That would be enough to rattle a sighted person, but can you imagine how frightening and disorienting it must have been for a blind person.
 Angry voices are coming from all sides with the same negative message.

If I were making a movie on this passage I would capture the image of person after person coming up to Bartimaeus and in a very ungracious way telling him to be quiet.
 I would try to convey a sense of unrest, confusion and uncertainty.

But, I would follow that sense of confusion with a look of determination on the face of Bartimaeus. Instead of bowing to the demands of the crowd he would begin to shout even louder out of great faith.

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

FAITH AND REFUSING TO BE QUIET

This blind man's refusal to be quiet is indeed an example of great faith.

He certainly had reason to be quiet.

He depended upon that crowd for alms.

His existence was literally dependent upon their mercy.

But, now the Son of Timaeus puts his faith entirely in Jesus.

He will not be silenced even if it means defying those on whom he is dependent.

We might not beg for a living, but all of us are dependent upon others in various ways.

And sometimes that dependence gets in the way of faith.

Sometimes we are quiet because we are afraid of the crowd.

The faithful follower of Jesus finds the courage to speak the truth even when the truth puts our old way of life in jeopardy.

In the final analysis our salvation does not come from our job or those who give us what we need.

And sometimes we must speak up for Jesus instead of going along with the crowd.

That requires courage.

Bartimaeus demonstrated that kind of courage.

He would not be silent.

He shouted for mercy from the Son of David.

JESUS HEARS HIM

And Jesus heard him.

I wonder if it was hard to hear the shouts of the blind man over the din of the crowd?

No matter. Jesus had a way of hearing and feeling the needs of those who were lost in the crowd.

Do you remember the time the woman with an issue of blood touched Jesus?

She too had faith. She thought, “If I can just touch his garment I can be healed.” She did it, and she was healed.

But, Jesus felt the power leave him as she was healed. He stopped and he asked, “Who touched me?”

The disciples thought he was crazy.

There was a crowd all around him.

But Jesus stopped and acknowledged the woman’s faith, a faith that made her well.

In the same way, Jesus stopped in the middle of a noisy crowd as he left Jericho on the way to Jerusalem to take notice of a blind man by the side of the road.

THROWING OFF THE MANTLE

Jesus said, “Call him here.”

This is a story about healing, but it is also a story about following Jesus. It is a call story.

Like the first disciples that Jesus called, Bartimaeus leaves something behind.

It was in our story for today.

Do you remember what it was?

Jesus calls Bartimaeus.

The crowd that had previously tried to hush Bartimaeus now tells him, “Take heart. He is calling you.”

Literally the crowd said, “Lift up your heart.” In the Bible, that phrase, “lifting up your heart” was a way to describe the coming of God’s salvation.

Bartimaeus didn’t have to be told twice.

He threw off his cloak, jumped up and came to Jesus.

The details suggest another act of faith.

The cloak was a means of protection from the elements for a man who spent his days outside, and it was also what Bartimaeus used to collect coins from those who would take pity on a blind beggar.

When he threw off the cloak, Bartimaeus was symbolically throwing off that old way of life.

He was literally making a leap of faith.

It's sort of the reverse of what happened with prophets in the Old Testament. For example, Elisha put on the mantle or the cloak of his old master Elijah. This was a sign that he would now be God's prophet in Israel.

Bartimaeus threw off the old mantle so that he could he could come to Jesus.

Remember the rich man that we talked about two weeks ago? He couldn't give everything up and follow Jesus. He had too much.

Bartimaeus provides a counter example.

While Bartimaeus doesn't possess much, the little that he has, his cloak, is something that he needs to survive, and his casting it aside is a sign of his trust, his faith in Jesus.

He believes that he won't need it again.

He has faith that from this moment he won't be returning to his spot by the side of the road. Instead of begging in order to live, his life will belong to Jesus.

He was not the first to take such a step.

Two weeks ago we also read how Peter reminded Jesus that they had left everything to follow him. And they had. Jesus' disciples also left their old way of life behind to follow Jesus. They left their jobs, their homeland and their families to come after Jesus.

But, Jesus promised that their sacrifice would not be in vain. As they followed him on the way, what they lost would be more than replenished.

In one way or another, throwing off the old life is a part of every faith journey.

If you're going to follow Jesus you have to throw off the old mantle so that you can put on a new one.

One commentator put it this way,

“Faith sits, leaning forward, ready to leap at the opportunity to answer God’s call whenever it might come, and it shows itself willing to shed whatever holds it back from the journey.”

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM JESUS?

The final step in the journey to faith is to ask for healing.
When Bartimaeus threw off his cloak and came to Jesus,

Jesus asked,
“What do you want me to do for you?”

This question is a familiar one in the Bible. I am reminded of the question Jesus asked the crippled man by the pool. “Do you want to be healed?”

He did indeed want to be healed but he was looking for healing in all the wrong places. Healing would not be found by making his way into the pool that had a reputation for miracles.

Healing would be found by asking for healing from Jesus.

Jesus told the man by the pool,
“Stand, take up your mat and walk.”
And the man was healed. (John 5:2-8)
The same was true for Bartimaeus.

Jesus asked him what he wanted, and Bartimaeus dared to ask for a miracle.

He said, “My teacher, let me see again.”
Jesus replied, “Go; Your faith has made you well.”

ON THE WAY WITH JESUS

Immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight.

But, he didn’t go.
He didn’t try to resume the life that was his before he was blinded.

Instead, he followed Jesus on the way.
The one who lived along the way is now on the way with Jesus.

His new vision reorients his whole life.
In Mark’s gospel Bartimaeus is the only person healed who also follows Jesus.

I wonder if Bartimaeus told the crowds how his sight had been restored as the band of disciples made their way into Jerusalem.

Maybe that's how the cry of Bartimaeus became the cry of many.

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is coming kingdom of our ancestor David!”

That's just speculation, but when a blind man sees, the world takes notice.

And when lives are changed by the power of the gospel, the road to faith takes on new excitement and promise.

Physical sight is not necessary for discipleship, but personal restoration is always necessary.

Old ways have to be left behind and new ways have to be embraced.

ALWAYS REFORMING

Churches of the Protestant Reformation mark a special day this month. On October 31, 1517 the Reformation was born. The church changed as a result of a renewed commitment to Grace, Faith and the witness of Scripture.

The motto of the Reformed church is “the church reformed and always reforming” according to the Word of God.

In other words, we embrace a view of faith where the old way of life is always being shed in order to follow Jesus more perfectly.

It is a liberating thought, but it is also challenging one as well.

It means that we are constantly being asked by Jesus,
“What do you want me to do for you?”

And we are constantly having to respond,
“Teacher, let me see again.”

Spiritual blindness is a chronic disease.

And all of us are afflicted.

Our only hope is that the Savior will hear our cries for mercy and open our eyes to the truth of the gospel.

Today's lesson suggests that our cries do not fall on deaf ears. The Savior does hear us.

Indeed, through the words of Scripture and the community of faith he continues to be our Rabbi.

He is our teacher. He opens our eyes that we may see.

He provides guidance and invites us to follow him along the way.

Wendell Berry said that to "treat life as less than a miracle is to give up on it."

Today we learn of Bartimaeus, a man of great faith who believed that a miracle was possible. A miracle was possible because Jesus was near and calling him.

He jumped at the chance to see again.

And so should we.

Amen.