

I Want to See!

Psalm 121; Mark 10:46-52

October 10, 2021

No one wants to see more than a blind person. The Gospel of Mark tells two stories of Jesus restoring the sight of a blind man. The first is in chapter 8, where Jesus put saliva on the man's eyes and laid his hands on him. Jesus asked, "Can you see anything?" The man said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on the man a second time, and the man's "sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly." (8:25)

In our Gospel lesson today, we have another story of Jesus healing a blind man—this time in Jericho. In this story Jesus tells the man, "Go, your faith has made you well." (9:52)—and the man immediately regains his sight. His name was Bartimaeus and he was blind. What's interesting is that in the Greek, the word *bar* meant "son of." The word *timaos* meant "honor." So this poor, blind beggar was named "Son of Honor."

That name must have seemed cruelly ironic to people who knew him. There isn't much about sitting in the dirt and begging that speaks of honor. He sits bent over by the side of the road, eating dust for breakfast while he listens for footsteps. The morning air is already warm. Still, he wraps his cloak tightly around himself. His cloak is his security blanket, his home, his sleeping place, the only protection from the rain and the hot Jericho sun. It is also a shield for the hate-filled eyes and the taunts of those who pass by, a cover for his shame.

He sits there, day after long day, minute by minute, without hope . . . without a future. He had run out of options. Like so many others - the lame, the lepers, the afflicted, he had to beg for a living. He would rattle his cup and call out, "Alms! Alms! Have mercy on me, a blind beggar!" Perhaps someone tossed him a coin now and then. Perhaps he had become little more than a fixture along the side of the road, a poor creature to be pitied by anyone with feelings, but never to be invited along, never to be included by others, or given anything of value. He had no hope. No future. No dreams of a better tomorrow. He would not even be able to see his way to go to the synagogue.

Mark tells us that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when he passed through Jericho. His earthly ministry was almost finished, and he is giving his disciples their last lessons along the way to Jerusalem where he told them he would suffer and die. An interruption along this important journey is the *last* thing Jesus needed. He is walking with a great crowd. They were all going up to Jerusalem for the Passover – the great Jewish festival of deliverance.

The road ahead was a rough one, 23 miles and climbing 4000 feet to the city, a road that is still difficult to travel today. But back then it was also known as a dangerous road where

thieves and robbers waited around the bend to ambush unsuspecting travelers who walked the road alone. Jesus is on his way up this perilous road. Yet despite the difficult journey ahead, the mood on the way to the Holy City was joyful. There was probably singing and excitement along the way. There were stories and conversations among old friends.

Finally, the day arrived when Jesus came to town. Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus. He was blind, but he was not deaf! When he heard the excited crowd approaching, he called out loud and clear to Jesus: "Jesus, Son of David, have *mercy* on me! Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on *me!*"

The people were embarrassed. They didn't want Jesus to be offended. They didn't want a public scene, and so they tried to keep Bartimaeus quiet. You probably know someone like that – someone who just won't stop talking. They blurt out whatever comes to mind. But Bartimaeus was persistent. His cries became louder and more urgent. The lowly, blind beggar kept calling out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Well there's something to be said for persistence, because Jesus stopped to listen. He gave Bartimaeus his full attention and asked him directly. He said, "Bartimaeus, what do you want me to do for you?" It was like receiving a blank check from God. Bartimaeus said, "My teacher, let me see again."

Jesus didn't even touch him like he did the other blind man in Mark's gospel. He simply said, "Go, for your faith has healed you." He was free at last! Free to do whatever he wanted. Free to see, free to go wherever his sight led him, free to follow every beautiful sight, the trees, the flowers, the meadows, the sea, the sky.

Perhaps Bartimaeus was the only one there that day who truly *saw* Jesus. While so many others who followed Jesus could "see" in a physical sense, they were nonetheless spiritually blind. Bartimaeus knew what he wanted, and he knew that he could expect great things from Jesus when he met him. JESUS STOPPED and listened, and a miracle occurred. It only takes a minute for a miracle to happen when you have an encounter with the living Christ, the Son of God.

Now for more Good News: Jesus is passing through here today, just as he walked by Bartimaeus long ago. And Jesus is asking you the same question he asked Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?" What would you say? What would you ask Jesus to do for you when he looks at you and asks that question? Would some part of you cry out like Bartimaeus, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Would you cry out of your physical pain and ask for it to be taken away? Would you cry out of anguish or loneliness? Would you cry out, asking Jesus to take away painful memories or feelings of guilt that haunt you to this day? Would you cry out of discouragement or despair about what life

has handed you to deal with at this point? Or maybe you would cry out to Jesus about a son or daughter who has turned their backs on you and God. What if Jesus were to come by today, and say to you what he said to Bartimaeus? "What do you want me to do for you?"

Sooner or later, we're all like Bartimaeus, sitting by the side of the road, blind to the opportunities that surround us . . . blind to God's blessings . . . and blind to all the ways God may already be working in our lives.

But in addition to asking Jesus what we might want him to do for us, we might notice some ways that we are blind spiritually. In her book, White Fragility, the author Robin DiAngelo points out some of the ways we are blind to racism in America, and most of the time, we don't even know it. I look around my development, and there is only one black family, and they just recently moved in. We look around Marin County, and it is predominantly white. Even lending practices in some areas are subject to redlining.

When we look at our country, sometimes we fail to see how many families with children are living below the poverty level, or how many are threatened with eviction from their homes with no place to go. And why does it often go unnoticed that covid-19 affects blacks and Hispanics in disproportionate numbers? Why do we fail to see the thousands of native Americans who have been pushed off of their land into reservations, where they often are without the most basic healthcare? Haven't we seen the thousands of refugees trying to cross the border, fleeing from violence and poverty?

Do we not notice ways people are still excluded and discriminated against because of their sexual identity? I'm afraid too many people and government officials fail to see the devastating impact of climate change until it's too late, and it was heartbreaking to see images of the terrible oil spill off the coast of southern California just last week. When will more people and politicians wake up and take action about climate change instead of turning a blind eye?

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me . . . I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now, I see." So often people turn a "blind eye," maybe not because they can't see, but because they don't *want* to see. Sometimes I think we're worse off than Bartimaeus. At least he had a good excuse. Bartimaeus had hope. He had faith. His eyesight was restored, and he was able to see in ways he never imagined. We have no excuses.

Remember the question Jesus asked Bartimaeus. What do you want Jesus to do for you? . . . Right now . . . Right here today?" How could he restore your vision, even if there is nothing physically wrong with your eyesight? Maybe we have a "come to Jesus" moment, when spiritually our eyes are opened and we see people and life situations as we have never seen them before -- occasions when we can see each person as a child of God

– someone created in God’s image and likeness, worthy of respect and equality. We should all pray for that kind of vision; we should all pray that our eyes will be opened, and we’ll be able to recognize and rectify our blind spots, because we all have them.

It’s interesting what happened at the end of today’s story. Jesus just said the word, and Bartimaeus received his sight. Not even a laying on of hands. And do you remember what he did next? When he opened his eyes, Bartimaeus only knew that he had encountered the Son of God. Immediately after he received his sight, he got up and followed Jesus, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he followed him all the way to Jerusalem. He *had* to tell others what Jesus had done in his life. His enthusiasm couldn’t be contained. His life was changed.

I hope that happens for you when you gain both spiritual sight and insight. God’s vision is 20/20, and today it can be yours too. Amen

## Psalm 121

- <sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?
- <sup>2</sup> My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.
- <sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- <sup>4</sup> He who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.
- <sup>5</sup> The LORD is your keeper;  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
- <sup>6</sup> The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.
- <sup>7</sup> The LORD will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.
- <sup>8</sup> The LORD will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore.

## Mark 10:46-52

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." 52 "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.