

Rev. Dan Welch Pent 22 10-24-21 Text- Mark 10: 46-52

There's a clever idea that some congregations practice: all their members wear name tags while at church. That's not primarily for the members' own benefit; most of them know one another already. It's for the benefit of **visitors**.

Why not just make name tags for visitors? Well, besides perhaps causing some visitors to feel uncomfortable, as if they're being singled out, studies have found that new people start to feel at home in a group not when others call **them** by name, but when **they** become able to call **others** by name. So, the new folks become able to say, "Good morning, Mary!" "Hi, Joe!"

Bartimaeus is one of the few recipients of Jesus' many healing miracles that we learn to call by name. There's Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead (Jn 11:43-44), Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus cast out seven demons (Lk 8:2), Malchus, whose severed ear Jesus repaired (Jn 18:10; Lk 22:50-51), but not many others. Bartimaeus, we feel we get to know better. And perhaps that makes us appreciate his healing more than we do for all those countless, nameless others whom Jesus healed.

But that's not at all what mattered to Bartimaeus. He didn't care whether **we** called **him** by name. What mattered to Bartimaeus was that **he** was able to call **somebody else** by name: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 47). What mattered to Bartimaeus was that **he** could call **Jesus** by name.

Not **one** of those multitudes of people whom Jesus healed was nameless to **Him**; He knew them all. And Jesus knows every single one of **us** by name. So, the great gift He's given each of us is the ability to call on His name, **by** name in much the same way that Bartimaeus called on Jesus by name in our Gospel lesson. Let's take some time to dig into today's Gospel account of Jesus' healing Bartimaeus and see how else it applies to our lives. (Pause)

As I was doing some research into our text this past week, I discovered that Mark's account of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus bookends in a very significant way with **another** story Mark tells, the story of Christ previously restoring sight to a different, unnamed, blind man in chapter 8. And the two stories are more than just the doubling up of a good thing. Today, I'd like us to look at the subtle differences between these two

miraculous events. We'll also look at what happens *between* the two miracles. By doing this, my goal is that by the end of this message, we will understand more clearly what it means for each of *us* to be a disciple of Jesus. (Pause)

It actually shouldn't be surprising that Mark would report two healings of blind men in his book: Bartimaeus in our text and the unnamed man back in chapter 8, verses 22-26. The reason I say it really shouldn't come as a surprise is that Jesus, the Messiah came to restore the fallen creation and blindness is one evidence of the fallen creation that the prophets in the Old Testament reported again and again. Isaiah especially does this. As a matter of fact, when he describes what miraculous signs the Messiah will do, Isaiah lists healing the blind first on his list. As we read in Isaiah 35: "Then the eyes of the **blind** shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped" (35:5) and so on. Again, opening the eyes of the blind is at the top of the list. So, it certainly makes sense that Mark would feature Jesus performing *this* miracle, not just once but twice.

But by pairing Jesus' healing of Bartimaeus with His earlier healing of a blind man, Mark is also directing us to another kind of blindness, not physical blindness, but *spiritual* blindness. Here's why I say this: Just before the earlier healing, the disciples had demonstrated an amazing lack of understanding about Jesus feeding five thousand people and then four thousand. And Jesus had asked them, 'Although you have eyes, do you not see?' (8:18). In other words, Jesus was saying, can't you perceive that these and all the other signs I've been doing tell you who I truly am?

How often could Jesus ask the same question to us? 'Although you have eyes, do you not see?' How many times do we lose sight (yes, pun intended!) of who Jesus is and what He can and does do for us? For example, and without getting into the politics of why the following statement is true, a lot of people today, including me, are complaining about the price of groceries going up. Wouldn't a better way to handle this challenging situation, over which I really have no control, be to thank God for what I do have including having the family that I'm buying the

groceries to feed? To say nothing of thanking Him for the daily necessities He graciously provides for *me*, as well!

Or another example: If we are harboring hard feelings, a grudge or unforgiveness towards someone who has done us wrong. Shouldn't we first thank God for His undeserved forgiveness that He has shown to *us* and ask Him to help us to go and do likewise towards others? Oh yes, through these examples and more, Jesus could just as well say the same thing to me, and to you, that He said to His disciples: 'Although you have eyes, do you not see?' (8:18).

Let's return to Bartimaeus, because He recognized the truth about himself and the truth about Jesus, so he sets a wonderful example for us. Bartimaeus knew that he was nothing but given to by God. He cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He was *begging* for the Lord's mercy. The question is, do we realize *we* too were also at one time blind beggars? Do we understand that we also are nothing but given to by God? Martin Luther certainly realized this. In fact, shortly before his death, the great church reformer and esteemed professor of theology scribbled these humble words on a piece of paper: "We are all beggars, it is true."

The great Good News is that Jesus delights to extend God's mercy to all who ask of Him. Bartimaeus discovered this. When Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus said to him, 'Rabbi, let me recover my sight.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go your way; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he recovered his sight" (vv. 51- 52a).

Jesus performed a wonderful miracle for this man, yet Mark suggests there's *more* to it than just the recovery of physical sight. Mark adds that Bartimaeus then 'followed Jesus on the way' (v 52b). So, we see, (again pun intended) that *spiritual* sight is the greatest miracle here, much better than the recovery of *physical* sight.

Interestingly, in the earlier miracle, found in Mark chapter 8, the unnamed blind man was healed in *two* stages. When Jesus first acted, the man could see only vaguely, without clarity; clear vision came only with Jesus' second touch. This time, Bartimaeus sees clearly *immediately*.

I believe Mark is suggesting that, metaphorically, clear vision was *impossible* before (remember the disciples' blindness before this event?) but now clear vision is indeed possible. Why the difference? What's changed? Here's the really interesting thing that I hadn't noticed before: Between the two healings, Jesus has *three times* predicted His suffering, death, and resurrection. It happens in chapter 8, verse 31, chapter 9, verse 31 and in chapter 10, verses 33-34. *Three* times! The deeper meaning that, I believe, Mark is getting at is that the coming of God's kingdom in Jesus can only be seen clearly in light of His death and resurrection.

*This* is the sight Christ wants *us* to gain—to see that God's kingdom has come *in Him*. It's what Bartimaeus saw when Jesus said to him "Your faith has made you well" (literally it reads "your faith has saved you") (v 52a). *We also* see clearly when we believe that Jesus' death on the cross has saved us and made *us* well. Jesus has forgiven us for the times when we have untrustingly grumbled and complained about our lot in life. He forgives me for all my sins, including the times I confess I have not been forgiving of others as I should. For Jesus' sake, and with *your* trust in Him, *your* sins are forgiven! Christ has saved you! He has made you well!

Today, Jesus' two healings of blind men have enabled us to *see* what true discipleship is like. It's exemplified by the beggar, who can offer nothing to Jesus but can only receive. Being a disciple, a follower, of Christ will mean carrying a cross as Jesus will carry a cross. This same is true for Bartimaeus and for anyone else who would follow Jesus, including you and me. In Mark 8:34 Jesus says it, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me".

At the very end of our text, Bartimaeus, the beggar, immediately follows Jesus on the way that will lead to Jerusalem and Jesus' death. As true disciples today, we also will also follow Jesus as beggars, dependent on His mercy, on the road that will lead to our own sufferings. What those sufferings will look like exactly, only the Lord Himself knows, but it could very well include rejection by friends and loved ones for being a follower of Christ.

But the important point is this: Following Jesus to His cross will also lead us on the way to **resurrection** under His gracious, eternal reign and rule. As St. Paul joyfully assures us in Romans 8:18, “The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us”! And as the hymn writer says it so vividly:

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation

And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!

Then I shall bow in humble adoration

And there proclaim: “My God, how great Thou art!” (LSB 801:4)

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Jesus wants no one to miss out on that. That’s why He opens our eyes to truly see Him as our Savior; the One who delights to have mercy on us. And in response, like Bartimaeus we joyfully follow Jesus on His way, by faith. Amen!