

Jordan Station United Church

October 24, 2021

Rev. Anita Spiller

Sermon: "A blind man has a vision"

(Mark 10:46-52)

This account of the healing of Bartimaeus concludes a central section in the Gospel of Mark that began in chapter 8, verse 22 with the healing of another blind man. In that story Jesus came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. That passage always makes me laugh thinking that it took two tries for Jesus to heal this first blind man. In today's passage he does it on the first try. But with Bartimaeus this is not just a story of restoring sight but the story of someone who truly "sees" Jesus.

As a healing story, the normal elements are present. Someone has a problem, there is some factor that complicates things, Jesus offers the cure, the result is confirmed, and then there is some response to the miracle. Within this passage and elsewhere in Mark's Gospel, however, there are indicators that something else is going on here. Bartimaeus is not only healed but also called as well. This is not simply a healing story, but it is also a call story, and Bartimaeus is set forth as an example of a faithful disciple.

So, we have two stories of blind men. Why two? Repetition in the bible is important. Repetition in the bible is important. Repetition in the bible is important. When you hear something said twice or even three times you should stand up and take notice. Arguably, we the reader do not need another story to confirm that Jesus can restore sight but we do need is to be reminded that not only did Jesus get better at healing but that gaining full sight is progressive and it takes time. Just like full insight about Jesus' identity will also take some development and time.

The blind man in Mark's first account is quite passive, but Bartimaeus certainly is not. Though he cannot see, when he hears that Jesus is passing by, he begins crying out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This is the first time that "Son of David" as a title is applied to Jesus. So how does

this beggar know and recognize Jesus as the Son of David? The inner circle that includes the disciples that has access to private teaching has not yet figured this out so how is it that Bartimaeus knows? He shows insight that is perfectly clear. Clear that is, for someone who understands and believes in Jesus.

What does it mean to see? What does he recognize in Jesus? Remember that Bartimaeus says to Jesus, 'My teacher, let me see again.' We do not know if he once had sight in the physical sense of the word but here and now, he wants his sight to be regained. For this to happen, Bartimaeus had to shout to be heard, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly. This begging the question, why were so many people trying to silence him? Where they trying to control access to the healing man or were they embarrassed because this dirty old blind beggar wasn't worthy? Either way it is a question of welcome and who has access to Jesus, to God and in today's context to the church. I love the part in the story where he throws off his cloak, springs up and comes to Jesus. I have this vision of him abandoning his economic status, his cloak (which is likely his only possession) that marks him as a poor man and leaps up to come to Jesus when he is called.

Another fun fact is that Jesus directs all the people who were telling Bartimaeus to be quiet to go and get him and bring him forward. It makes me laugh when Jesus forces the crowds to participate when they previously did not want to. Jesus could have easily gone to him but he didn't, he forced them to help him to prove to them that he is indeed worthy. In this moment for me, it is a story of the calling of new disciples like Bartimaeus and the formation of existing ones. All those who earlier wanted him to be quiet are now called to help make him well.

At the conclusion of this story, Bartimaeus immediately regains his sight and follows Jesus on the way. Here is where the call aspect of this story becomes clear. In the other call stories in Mark, "following" Jesus is crucial! Simon, Andrew, James, and John are all called to follow Jesus (1:16-20) as is Levi the tax collector (2:14). The rich man (10:17-21) is told to sell everything and follow Jesus. Regarding true disciples, Jesus is explicit in (Mark 8:34) "Let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

So, when have you been called to follow Jesus? I was at a preaching conference while I was on sabbatical and one of the workshops I attended was called "Where have all the young adults gone?" Gone are the days when young people would leave the church after confirmation but come back after college or University when they were newly married. This doesn't

happen very often anymore because young people engage with the world differently than most of us did when we were young. The workshop leader offered one simple way to be in relationship with adults between the ages of 18 and 30. Follow! Don't lead, or run programs. Follow! Don't expect that they will come back and gather in your youth room with the comfy couches and posters on the wall. Follow! Studies show that the faith and curiosity amongst this group is not only strong but growing. What we know is that young people engage with God constantly and want to explore what it means to be followers of Jesus. They don't however necessarily want to come to church. The leader's advice was to go where they are and be where they are. Follow them on twitter and instagram. Meet them at coffee shops and skating rinks or wherever they are in your community. Join them at being church in the world by actively living out their faith in justice work. Meeting them where they are is key and letting them take the lead will make all the difference. As disciples we are called to look towards the future and believe that Jesus will guide the way. When we are called, we must act like Bartimeaus and when our faith has made us well, we must follow Jesus immediately.

I like that this translation does not say that he was healed but rather that his faith has made him well. Sometimes this passage and others like it can be a struggle with all those who suffer physical or mental ailments. Especially those who are faithful followers of Jesus that want nothing more than to be healed themselves. When our bodies are broken, the healing stories are problematic because we have not been healed despite our constant prayers. One way of looking at these stories is that not everyone gets healed but that God is indeed healing in so many ways. It is a reminder that your faith can save you and not just heal you. So perhaps you will be spiritually healed and saved even if your body is not restored. Sight then is really just metaphoric. This blind man had a vision of the promise of a new way of being even if he could actually see. Following Jesus makes him whole and well and yes even saved.

It is my prayer for this week that we might wrestle with this question of how do we act as followers of Jesus? How as a community can we nurture this idea of saving grace and healing for each one of us. How do we throw down our cloaks and leap up to follow Jesus on the way? And perhaps most importantly how do we recognize the beggars among us and not work to quiet them but to shout with them "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Thanks be to God, Amen!