

## Scripture and Message

27 October 2024

### Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

<sup>46-48</sup> They spent some time in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town, trailed by his disciples and a parade of people, a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road. When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, he began to cry out, “Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!”

Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder, “Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!”

<sup>49-50</sup> Jesus stopped in his tracks. “Call him over.”

They called him. “It’s your lucky day! Get up! He’s calling you to come!” Throwing off his coat, he was on his feet at once and came to Jesus.

<sup>51</sup> Jesus said, “What can I do for you?”

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

<sup>52</sup> “On your way,” said Jesus. “Your faith has saved and healed you.”

In that very instant he recovered his sight and followed Jesus down the road.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Thanks be to God.**

### Message: Seeing

We started out this month where Jesus was reminding us to be child-like, to receive God with our whole being. Then we realized that often the impossible challenges put in front of us were invitations to grow. Last week Jesus taught us to look for simple ways to make our community better through service. What is Jesus teaching us today with this last story, this last healing before entering Jerusalem and starting on the path to the cross? This is the last story before Jesus enters Jerusalem and it is a healing story – which mirrors the beginning of Mark when one of Jesus’s first acts is to heal the mother-in-law of Simon Peter. In this story, Jesus is not healing a family member of a disciple, or a friend, or even someone who was counted as important, in this story, Jesus is healing the guy on the corner who is always asking for a hand-out.

The end of the story has Bartimaeus following Jesus. In Mark and in the other Gospels, that often means he became a disciple – which may be why, of all the people Jesus healed, talked to, interacted with, Bartimaeus is one of the few who is identified – identified as Bartimaeus son of Timaeus. Identified in such a way that people who read this or who heard this story can say, “O yeah! I know him! He’s the one who told our village about Jesus!” Not even Peter’s mother-in-law, the first person healed in Mark, is given a name – but Bartimaeus is identified clearly and fully – as if he was important – as if people should know who he was. But in the beginning of our story, Bartimaeus was not important, instead, Bartimaeus was a fixture on that roadside corner. So common and expected, the crowd, people became used to not seeing him, or perhaps used to not looking at him – looking past him – looking at anything but him. Do you find yourself doing that? What and who do we overlook because we are so used to seeing it – or not seeing it? I know I am really careful not to meet the eyes of the people with signs on the corners in Ithaca. I am very careful not to see them. Who else do we avoid seeing?

The people of Jericho were used to seeing Bartimaeus begging by the roadside. They were used to him calling out, “Alms! Charity! Do a mitzvah, a blessing toward God, by giving a blind man a coin or some food! Charity! Alms!” They told him to be quiet. They told him to keep to the margins, to stay away, to not interrupt. But he kept on shouting, and today he was shouting something new and different. Instead of shouting for alms, Bartimaeus was shouting, “Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!” And Jesus, being Jesus, tells the crowd who was trying to get Bartimaeus to hush up and stop bothering the rabbi, Jesus tells the crowd to call

him over, instead of hushing him up, instead of trying to sweep him under the table, instead of trying not to look – not to see him. Instead of calling out to Bartimaeus himself, or going over to Bartimaeus, Jesus gets the same crowd that was hushing Bartimaeus involved in saving Bartimaeus. How do we get the community involved in our missions and ministries?

Actually, this church does a lot of that well already. We have several churches involved in the community dinners – we might be one of the sponsors, but we haven't been doing them alone for years. And Our Brother's Keepers group – that group has a lot of community support – we even get support from outside our community when we accept material from people from other communities in the area. The community has some ownership in these outreach and missions programs. They do not belong just to DUMC, they belong to Dryden as a whole – and because of that, they will remain – they will continue – even if they need to change their venue.

When I wonder why Jesus gets the community involved, it reminds me of the pride the community will take in Bartimaeus's healing. Instead of saying, "Yeah, the visiting rabbi went and healed that blind man that sits and yells by the road to Jerusalem," they can say, "Yeah! We called blind Barty over to Jesus so the rabbi could heal him!" By involving them in the healing, the crowd had a stake in the outcome, and in whatever happens next.

But the next part of the story has always seemed wrong to me – maybe because I have never been around a functioning blind person before, but when the crowd tells Bartimaeus that Jesus is calling him, the text reads that Bartimaeus gets up, throws off his cloak and goes at once to Jesus. My question is about how? How did he walk right to Jesus if he was blind? Did the crowd part before him? Did people reach out to guide him? How did he know where to go? In my imagination, the only way I can figure out this working without it being a farce is for each of the people in the crowd to take an elbow, guide by a touch on the shoulder, shout out directions, kind of passing Bartimaeus along from person to person until they guide him right to Jesus's feet – to Jesus's face. Another example of crowd sourcing – Bartimaeus may not have known where to go or who to stop in front of, but the crowd around him did and they guided him into place and then held their collective breath while waiting to see what was next. And Bartimaeus trusted them – the crowd that looked past him, the crowd that tried to hush him – Bartimaeus trusted them to guide him to the place he needed to be. He trusted them to guide him to Jesus. What an act of courage to trust the very people who have worked for so long to make you invisible. And the crowd was worthy of that trust – we need to remember to be worthy when we are trusted. We do this so well when we treat our guests on Wednesday nights as guests and eat with them and talk with them – even when our guests make us uncomfortable with their manners and ways of talking and life choices. But we left the crowd in our story – having successfully guided Bartimaeus to Jesus – watching to see what was next. And what was next was Jesus asking a question. Bartimaeus calls out for help, the crowd helps him to Jesus and now, Jesus asks, "What can I do for you?" Which is also different from the other healing stories about Jesus. Usually Jesus doesn't ask questions, he just heals people – says things like, "Your faith has made you well," or "your sins are forgiven." And really, shouldn't Jesus have already known what Bartimaeus wanted? He was shouting for attention, and he was shouting for mercy, and he was blind. Of course, he is going to know what he wanted. And Bartimaeus did know what he wanted, but not everyone does. Think about it, if God knocked on your door this afternoon – if Jesus rang the bell – and told you that you could have the one thing, what would you ask for?

There is a story about a woman named Betty who faced this quandary. When God asked Betty what she wanted she said, "What do I want from you? I thought I was supposed to want whatever you wanted me to want." God chuckles and says, "Well, that works too. But just for today, what can I do for you?" Betty hesitates.

What did she want? From God? Anything at all? “I don’t know. I think Jimmy would tell me to choose enough money for us to retire and maybe get a boat and spend some the winters somewhere warm.” “So, that’s what you want, money?” “No, no. That isn’t what I really want. Wait. Let me think...I don’t know, I know what I used to want. When I was younger, I wanted to be a famous movie star and wear fancy clothes to the awards ceremonies. I can sing a little, you know... Oh, I guess you do know.” God smiled and said, “So you want to be a famous movie star, that’s what you want from me?” “No, wait, wait.” Betty was starting to sit, she felt anxious. “I don’t know what I want. I know what I should want. I should want my children and grandchildren to be safe and happy, to find good partners who love them, and I do want that, but...” “So you want health and happiness for your children and grandchildren? Is that what you’re asking for?” “Yes. No. I mean yes, it’s what I want, but it’s not what I want. I mean it’s not what I want from you, I mean...I don’t know what I mean...” And Betty got so flustered and upset she began to cry. And God reached out and touched her shoulder and said, “It’s OK, Betty. I’ll tell you what, why don’t we go inside and have a nice cup of coffee. We’ll sit together and you can think. Then you can tell me what you want from me.”

What do you want from God? Sometimes I want healing. Sometimes I want peace. Sometimes I just want to spend a week asleep in bed. Sometimes I want a huge benefactor to drop a million dollars on the church. Sometimes I want my kids to be happy and healthy. Sometimes I’m not really sure what I want though I know what I should want. Sometimes I’m a little like Betty.

Unlike Betty, Bartimaeus didn’t hesitate. “Let me see again”, he says. Not, “solve all my problems, Jesus, or make bad things or bad people go away. Let me see again. Let me see again, so that I can be about the business of opening eyes to who you are and what you have to offer this world that clings to its blindness. Let me see again, so that I can find you whenever I need to. Let me see so that I can lead others to you instead of needing others to lead me. Let me grab hold of you with my whole being. Let me accept this challenge to grow. Let me see new ways and old ways to serve you through serving others in this community and others. Let me see like you do. Let me love like you – we say with Bartimaeus. Let us see. That’s what we want, Lord, that’s what we need, we want, we need to see the world and each other the way you see us. Let us see Lord. Amen