

Mark 10: 46-52

What do you see?

The cry of a baby invokes an immediate response from us, especially if it is a newborn child. We check diapers, swaddle, feed, and love the child as an automatic response to their cry. We watch them take first steps and try our best to protect them as they grow and they experience their world as that sphere expands. We see them for the child they are, a precious gift from God. We will often ask in some way or another, "What can I do for you?" to show our love and concern.

There are other cries that we hear as well, they seem much easier to ignore. We see the person at the intersection with a sign saying, "Hungry. Need money for food. Anything helps." But with windows rolled up and staring ahead, not daring to make eye contact, we wait for the light to turn green. This is not to mention the people we walk past as we hurriedly get into Walmart or the church. Those who ask us, "Can you spare some change?" we don't want to see, hear, or engage. We forget that they too were born as precious gifts from God.

This story from Mark is about the person that we all walk past; the one whose voice we do not want to hear or whose face we prefer not to see. There are many reasons we don't want to acknowledge the voice or glance their way; we feel afraid for our safety and of what we don't know. Some people are disapproving and think that the person got themselves into this, so they can get themselves out of it. I do get that it is complicated, both our reactions and the reasons people find themselves on the streets.

On the day that Jesus and a group of people were headed from Jericho on their way to Jerusalem, the person all wanted to avoid was Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. Bartimaeus, was a blind beggar, sitting by the roadside. And he was doing what most of us will go to the other side of the street to avoid dealing with, he was shouting out. Calling out. Calling attention to himself. And of course, he was shhhd. Think of it as how people react when royalty or someone famous is around; those closest to them want to protect them from the ugly parts of their community, whether ugly is the scenery or the messiness of lives.

But Bartimaeus somehow knows, either by reputation or by rumour that this Jesus fella has got something special. By this point he may have heard of other miracle healings that spur him on to hope, but there is no way he is going to let this opportunity pass without making a fuss. Blindness is not fun at anytime, but blind and begging in the time of Jesus meant that you were an outcast. Which is why he finds himself on the side of the road, outside the city, outside of the community, outside of care.

The scripture doesn't tell us who was demanding he shut up and be quiet, it just says, *many*, but pretty sure *many* of us would have been feeling or reacting the same way. But this guy Bartimaeus is not giving up, he cries out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" This causes Jesus to stand still and say, "Call him here." This is how much power Jesus has, he can cause everything to stop around him just with a word. It may have been that the people who were trying to keep Jesus from being bothered with the man are now a little stunned, but they do a 180 and say to Bartimaeus, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

Let's pause for just a moment. Those who were the ones to shout at him to be quiet, are now quieted themselves as Jesus calls attention to Bartimaeus. They probably didn't know what to expect. Why would Jesus be bothered with this guy. Even after miracles and teaching over the years, those who followed Jesus did not get it. They did not understand that Jesus had a heart for the ones who were most in need. In their minds Jesus had a different purpose, one that would bring freedom to their people...but that was also the problem, they could not see that Jesus was bringing freedom, not just to the Israelites, but to all people. They saw a leader who would overthrow the government, but in the way *they* understood. Jesus was going to overthrow all governments, giving people freedom of heart, mind, and spirit. Some even got freedom from physical burdens and illness, but the focus for Jesus was always on freedom from sin and burdens of power, in ways that would restore relationships.

The response of Bartimaeus of being called over to Jesus is one worth noting. For Bartimaeus, or any person on the margins, his cloak was the most valuable thing he owned. This possession was his warmth, his security. It gave him a place to sit, to be covered, to provide some protection from the elements. It may even have been formed to shape a vessel in which to receive the currency he was begging for. Yet, in the moment Jesus calls him over, he threw off his cloak, sprang up and came to Jesus.

No hesitation, no clinging to his material possessions, no concern other than to be seen by Jesus. This in contrast to a story of a rich man who had come to Jesus and asked "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus' response was that he had to sell all he owned and give it to the poor. That man walked away sad. We don't know what he chose in the end, but when in the presence of Jesus, he too recognized Jesus as someone significant, yet he could not let go. Then here in our scripture reading today, we have Bartimaeus. He has one thing, and he leaves it behind. You may say, what did he have to lose, but when that is your only possession, all you can claim for your safety, I think it would be hard for most to let go.

Still, we know that Bartimaeus understands something about Jesus, and even though blind, he sees something in Jesus, about Jesus, that others cannot comprehend...this man Jesus is worth taking a chance on, he has power and Bartimaeus' faith, shown by his calling out, his throwing off his cloak, and by springing up, shows his faith in Jesus. Did you notice that all of this was action – calling out, throwing off, springing up – his faith was faith in action.

Jesus then asked the question that we spoke about last week in our reading from Mark, the same question that he poses to brothers James and John, “What do you want me to do for you?” James and John already had a relationship with Jesus, and their request to be able to sit one at Jesus right and one on his left in his glory showed how misunderstood Jesus was by those closest to him. Again in contrast, here is Bartimaeus, with Jesus asking him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He responds, “My teacher, let me see again.”

How beautifully insightful for a man without sight. First of all, he calls him “teacher” not master, lord, friend, but teacher. Think about what teacher means to you. It may have been those who taught you in school, whether grade school, tech school or university. It may have been your parent or grandparent, a mentor, but to use the word teacher about anyone is to give a particular meaning for how they have impacted your life. Recognizing someone as a teacher means that you can learn from them. Teachers have a way of reframing things, of bringing understanding, and of course knowledge. They see things from perspectives that another may not have.

Bartimaeus called Jesus teacher, and then says, “let me see again.” Let me see again. Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” And immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight.

Bartimaeus is healed physically, not everyone experiences that, not in Jesus’ time and not now. It is easy to see this as purely a miracle story, one in which sight is restored, but it is more than that and to leave it there would not give the whole story. You see, when Jesus said, “Go; your faith has made you well” another way to translate that sentence would be, your faith has saved you. Your faith has saved you. Bartimaeus’ actions showed the kind of faith he had that Jesus could save him and Jesus responded to that faith.

Jesus said “go” and where did this now saved man go? He followed Jesus to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus was calling out to Jesus who was on his way to Jerusalem and then found himself also on the way with Jesus.

The lenses through which to view these eight verses are many. Who do we see? What do we see? Do we see people who are problems, discarded, not worth our attention or do we see and respond with compassion? Do we see ourselves as worthy of Jesus attention? If we don’t think Jesus would bother with us, it is pretty difficult to imagine Jesus caring about anyone else’s needs, immediate or otherwise.

Are we like the people in the crowd trying to ignore the cries of the vulnerable, hoping that others won’t notice the unsightly? Maybe we have finally stopped and are just learning to turn our attention to those who we have not wanted to see and are wondering how we can help them to understand the love and compassion that Jesus has for them, remembering that Jesus is not standing in front of them, but us as ones who represent that love and compassion.

Remember also, it is not for us to do the healing of body, mind, and spirit. We do not ultimately have the power to change a life, but through our love, our compassion, our attention, our seeing, we can bring others to Jesus so they can experience the life-giving, transforming, healing presence of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe our take away from this scripture is to begin to notice who is around us, who are we avoiding, who are we stopping from seeing Jesus, where is Jesus, and what and who do we see when we see Jesus.

Eight verses about seeing packed full of meaning. May you be able to see how God is working in and through you and others as you go about your day and your life.

What do you see? In Jesus, Amen.