

Spiritually Blind

October 28, 2012

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.

Boy, are you blind!! I can't begin to tell you how many times I was asked that question by my mother as I was growing up. It was always, momma, where is so in so? Of course she would tell me and I would not be able to find it, whatever it was I was looking for. Finally, she would come in the room and it was exactly where she said it was; she could just lay her hand right on it. Then would come the question, the boy, are you blind? Now that I'm a little older and wearing glasses, I don't mind using the excuse that I'm blind in one eye and can't see out of the other. When I first read this scripture my initial thought was this was going to be an easy sermon to do; faith and it's healing powers. If your faith is strong enough, you can be healed. As I began to think about what to say, I began to realize that my initial thought process was completely wrong. First, the healing power of faith isn't what this morning's scripture is all about. And second, it isn't the strength of one's faith or lack of faith that causes someone to be healed or not to be healed. We all know people who have questionable belief systems and yet we have seen them healed. At the same time, we all know people who had faith large enough to move mountains and they were not able to be healed from their illnesses. Whether someone is healed or not is not an indication of their faith. Let me be very clear about that, whether someone is healed or not is not an indication of their faith.

Our scripture this morning is about a blind man named Bartimaeus. We have spent many Sunday's studying the scriptures in the Gospel of Mark. We are at a point in Mark where Jesus has begun his final journey to Jerusalem, begun his trip to the cross. And it is during this journey that, Jesus predicts his death three times; first in Mark 8: 32, second time Mark 9: 31; and again here in chapter 10: 33-34 Jesus predicts his death. Each time He does, he tells the twelve that they must be servants. Mark 8: 34-35, **Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."** ³⁵ **For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.** Then in Mark 9:35 **Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."** In our scripture lesson last week we heard how James and John wanted to be seated on the left and right of Jesus when he came to glory. James and John were asking for power and prestige. They wanted to be seen, not merely to see. In all they had been through with Jesus, they still didn't fully understand who He was and what He was about. They were spiritually blind. He rebuked them. Listen once again to Mark 10:43-44, **Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.** You must serve your fellow man, not be served.

Now they are continuing their journey and they have reached Jericho, a mere fifteen miles from Jerusalem. They have obviously spent the night there and are leaving town the next morning to continue to Jerusalem. The scriptures tell us that there is a throng of people around them. By this time in his ministry, Jesus has trouble going anywhere without drawing a crowd. The scriptures very plainly tell us, **Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city;** And as they begin to travel down the road, a blind beggar, Bartimaeus is sitting on the side of the road. As Jesus comes near, Bartimaeus begins to call out to Jesus asking to be healed. Listen to verses 47 & 48: **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!”** Several questions come from these two verses. First, why is he sitting on the side of the road begging? Let’s explore this for just a minute. Many of us may not think about it much, but what else could he do? In Jesus day, being blind was almost a death sentence. Most of the jobs were physical labor jobs. Being a shepherd; you had to look after sheep or livestock of some kind. Hard to “look after” anything when you’re blind. OK, how about being a farmer? Sort of difficult to plant or tend crops if you can’t see what you’re doing. How about carpentry? OK, go measure that board, then take the saw and cut it to the right length. Today, things are totally different; we have special schools for the blind, seeing eye dogs, Braille, audio books, the list goes on and on. We see the blind as being disadvantaged, but not helpless. Today, blind people can be independent and make a living for themselves. In his day, Bartimaeus was doing about all he could do; he was a beggar. He depended on the generosity of others. The second question that comes from these verses is why were the crowds trying to make him be quiet? I think possibly the crowds were ashamed of him; a beggar. Jesus doesn’t need to be bothered by a beggar. All he wants is a few more coins, Jesus doesn’t need to be bothered by him. Yet, Jesus does indeed want to see Bartimaeus. Jesus always wants to see those who are less fortunate, the children, the lepers, the poor, the sick, the hungry, bring them all to me. Wasn’t that always Christ’s response, bring them to me. And here again, Jesus tells the disciples, call him. Starting in verse 49: **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** As a beggar, Bartimaeus had only a few possessions, probably his most important his cloak. Beggars were known to spread their cloaks out around them to catch the few coins or morsels of food people would drop for them. Not only were they used to catch their only means of subsistence, they were their protection from the cold and weather, sometimes the only shelter a beggar might have. Yet, when Jesus calls, he throws his cloak aside and jumps to his feet. And what does Jesus say to him? Verse 51: **What do you want me to do for you?”** We heard that same question in last week’s scripture. Remember how James and John said we want you to do whatever we ask of you, and Jesus reply was **What do you want me to do for you?** This time it was a little different. Bartimaeus makes a different request of Jesus than do James and John. He does not seek power over others. He does not hope for high office in order that others will look up to him. He does not care to be seen. What he simply wants is to see. Bartimaeus does not crave being special. He wants only to be ordinary, to see the world around him. At this point in the story two more things happen. Listen again to verses 51 & 52 ⁵¹ **“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.** First, just as we would expect, Jesus heals Bartimaeus. All of a sudden after years of blindness, he can see again. Jesus didn’t reach out and touch him, he didn’t make any special poultices to put on

his eyes, no bandages to be removed in several days, Jesus simply stated, **“Go,” your faith has healed you.**” And the second thing that happens, Bartimaeus follows Jesus. He didn’t stop to pick up his cloak, he didn’t stop to gather any meager belongings he may have had, didn’t go find his friends or family to say good-bye, he simply followed Jesus along the road, the road to Jerusalem and the crucifixion.

That is all real good for Bartimaeus, but what does it say to each of us and to us as a church. The truth is, Jesus asks each of us, “What do you want me to do for you?” He asks us that question every day. This is a hard question for us as Christians. We have to pretend to have it all together. We are churchgoers, active in our congregation, we attend worship on a regular basis, so what do we need from Jesus? You see, when you think you have everything, it’s hard to make a list of things you really need. When you think you have it all together, the job, the house, the two kids and the dog, why do you need anything from Jesus? When you are standing at the front of the line in the world, it’s really hard to make a list of what you need from Jesus. Yet, Jesus asks each of us “What do you want me to do for you?” For many of us we have to work really hard to come up with an answer but that is the work we are called to do. When we know how to answer that question we profess it with ease like Bartimaeus, “Let me see.” When our eyes are opened, we are no longer spiritually blind. The last verse says that Bartimaeus immediately received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. He followed Jesus into Jerusalem.

What about us, how spiritually blind are we. As Christians, we know the scriptures, we know about Jesus’ lowly birth. We know about his ministry on earth. We know how Jesus was tried and crucified. We know He was raised from the dead. We know He is the son of God, and that through belief in Him we may each have eternal life, yet, how spiritually blind are we. We all know how Jesus asks us to live, yet, how many of us are living that life? How many of us are more afraid of what our friends and neighbors will think about us instead of what Christ thinks about us? How many of us are more like James and John and want to be seen instead of seeing? Spiritual Blindness, there is a cure. But you have to be willing to be like Bartimaeus and ask Lord, I want to see.