

“Hear My Humble Cry”

Mark 10: 46-52

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Have you ever had a time when your vision was threatened? The first experience I had was in high school. Most of you know I am a big sports fan. My love of sports began at an early age. In high school I was the only girl to be a manager for a boy's sports team. My twin brother played goalie on the hockey team so I was their manager. One night as I was recording shots on goal at the end of the bench a puck came careening off the ice and straight for my face. Thankfully, it hit me flat side on the cheek, narrowly missing my eye. Nothing was broken, but my face was swollen for days and I had difficulty seeing out of that eye. That was a bit too close for comfort. Another few inches and the outcome could have been catastrophic. Needless to say, I sat in the stands from that point forward, out of harm's way.

It is scary to imagine losing something as important as one's sight. Imagine for a moment how different your life would be if you could no longer see. As your eye sight becomes more limited so does your ability to do the things you have always done. At the ripe old age of 45 I am preparing to have my second cataract surgery next month. It is unusual for someone my age to need such surgery. As the cataract grows in my eye I notice its limiting affects. It is more challenging to drive at night with what they call the halo effect of oncoming headlights. The good eye compensates for the failing eye; however there is a point where it becomes obvious that something needs to be done. Thankfully, we can remove the damaged lens and replace it with a new one. Until they were able to perform such a procedure a cataract would simply rob a person of clear vision. Eventually it would be like seeing the world through lenses that have been smudge over with soap. The images are there, but you are not able to see anything clearly.

Imagine then what it must have been like to be a blind person in Jesus' community. Bartimaeus, the blind man in our gospel story, lived in a time when there was no help for those who were blind. As a matter of fact, some people considered blindness a punishment of sorts. In another encounter with a man who was blind from birth, the disciples ask Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2) We don't know the circumstances behind Bartimaeus' blindness. We do know that being blind would have made his life very difficult. He would have been an outcast in his community, forced to beg for what little he had. If he had no family to care for him, the community, believing him to be a sinner, would not likely have cared much for him beyond what he was able to beg from people.

Those who had to resort to begging for simple subsistence were the forgotten, powerless people of their world. In those days, begging was a kind of welfare system for those who were lucky enough to be allowed to beg. It would appear this man may have once been able to see because he asks Jesus to let him see *again*. How horrible it would be to have had sight and then to lose it, to live in darkness without hope of ever seeing the light again? How awful to live with the shame of believing you were somehow responsible for this affliction. What we hear today is more than a healing story. It is the final healing story in Mark's gospel but it is included to show more than Jesus' ability to heal. There is always something beyond the story that Mark intends to convey.

As we meet Bartimaeus, Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem to prepare for his final days. A great crowd has gathered around Jesus and continues to follow him. Bartimaeus happens to be in the right place at the right time on the right day. Jesus has one last chance to not only heal this man, but use it as a profound teachable moment for his disciples.

Throughout the disciple's journey with Jesus they have suffered from a kind of blindness. There's was not a physical blindness, but spiritual blindness. There were many occasions when they just didn't get it; they were not able to see what Jesus was trying to get them to see. Now, at the end of his ministry, Jesus is confronted by a man who is physically blind, but able to see Jesus in ways his closest companions do not.

As Jesus is busily on his way to Jerusalem, Bartimaeus cries out from his spot on the side of the road, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" He proclaims Jesus as the Son of David and receives his sight, he knows who Jesus is. The other disciples want to silence this man. They are uncomfortable with his presence, his persistence and his proclamation. What can he know? He is not one of the followers. He has never met Jesus and can not even see him, and yet, it is clear that Bartimaeus knows who Jesus is. After calling out to Jesus a second time, Jesus asks the disciples to bring Bartimaeus to him. Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Under the circumstances, this is an amazingly respectful and compassionate thing to do. Jesus could have healed him on the spot. He could have touched his eyes, restored his sight and sent Bartimaeus on his way. He does not do this. Instead, Jesus invites Bartimaeus to name his intentions. Bartimaeus courageously and faithfully replies, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus says, "Go; your faith has made you well." Bartimaeus demonstrates his thankfulness by immediately becoming a faithful disciple.

It is clear that Bartimaeus could already see what others could not. He did not have to have physical sight to understand. Mark uses this story to remind us of the difference it makes in our lives when our blindness is healed and we are able to see the world as God intends us to see it. We all suffer from some kind of blindness. You might call these blind spots or spiritual cataracts. We carry with us doubts or perceptions or prejudices or residual feelings that cloud our vision. As these things accumulate our vision becomes more and more impaired. It may keep us from responding in a loving way. It may lead us to lash out in anger at someone who we love. It may keep us estranged from a person who has been important to us. It may lead us to make decisions that are hurtful or destructive. Jesus was trying to teach the disciples that spiritual blindness can be as harmful and debilitating as physical blindness. Jesus shows us that he is able to heal all types of blindness.

We can learn some important lessons from Bartimaeus. Even though he was physically blind, he knew who Jesus was. No one would have thought Bartimaeus would be the one to make such a declaration about Jesus. Somehow Bartimaeus knows Jesus is the one God sent to redeem the world. Once again, God speaks through the least likely person and his witness helps others to follow more deeply. The crowd tries to silence him, but Jesus does not. Spiritual healing happens when we recognize Jesus Christ for who he is and who he can be in our lives.

Bartimaeus teaches us an important lesson about the power of persistence. Bartimaeus never gives up. People in the community would prefer he keep quiet and go away. There were those in the crowd who "sternly ordered him to be quiet," but Bartimaeus would not keep silent. He did not answer to their authority. He was willing to risk the ridicule of the people. After all, what did he have to lose? If Jesus ignored him he would be no worse off than he was when he got up that morning. He would keep shouting until he got Jesus' attention and had the opportunity to share his petition. We can learn a great lesson from his persistence. Some times we give up too easily. We may pray and feel as though our prayers are not answered. We may reach out to repair a broken relationship and give up when the overture is dismissed. We may call someone once and refuse to call again if the call goes unanswered. Bartimaeus would not give up and neither should we. It may only

take once for our petition or prayer to be answered, but it may take longer. His persistence was a sign of his faithfulness.

Bartimaeus was sure that if he could reach Jesus he would get what he needed. He trusted that Jesus would treat him with love and compassion. Jesus had many important things to do that day. In fact, Jesus was probably anxious about the future that awaited him, and still he stopped everything to minister to Bartimaeus. No issue was insignificant, no pain, no trouble too small for Jesus' attention. We are the ones who make that distinction. We are the ones to put limits on Jesus, believing we are not worthy of his time or attention. Bartimaeus teaches us that anything that keeps us from living the fullness of life as God intends is worthy of Jesus' attention. Sometimes it is the little things we allow to accumulate that wreak havoc in our lives. When we cry out to Jesus, as Bartimaeus did, Jesus will heal us, no matter how often we seek his healing touch.

Finally, we learn from Bartimaeus' response that this kind of encounter with Jesus has a profound effect on our lives. Jesus says to Bartimaeus, "Go, your faith has made you well." The story says, "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on his way." When we experience the generous, healing, comforting, and compassionate spirit of Jesus we respond by following him in a deeper more profound way. We say thank you to God by offering our lives as a living sacrifice. We say thank you by serving God in a community where we can deepen our faith. Here we have many of those transformative experiences. When we have had such an encounter it is easy to say yes when we are asked to serve. When we have had such an encounter it is with great joy that we make a sacrificial financial commitment to the church. When we have had such a life changing encounter with the holy it seems only natural to joyfully follow.

Jesus promises to restore our sight. For some it comes as it did for Bartimaeus, all at once in a single life changing episode. For others this clarity of vision comes more gradually, like cleaning away the smudges on a lens or a dirty window. Sometimes we are not aware of how impaired our vision has become until someone cleans it up. When the healing happens, we rejoice. Jesus asked Bartimaeus that day, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus responded, "Lord, let me see again." What is your request to God? Think for a moment. How would you complete the statement, "Lord, let me \_\_\_\_\_." Naming what you need is the first step toward healing. Jesus is ready to receive your petition and to give you what you need. May you have the courage to speak your truth before God and experience the joy that Bartimaeus did that day? Naming your need and then trusting that Jesus will meet you in that place will transform your life. May it be so! Amen

Source:

"Let Me See Again!" Sermon on Mark 10: 46-52 for October 29, 2000, Sermonhelp.com.