

Sermon Draft

Text: Mark 10:46-52

Sermon: "The Gift of Sight"

Does everyone have their name tag on this morning? Why do all members have them? Why do you wear name tags at church? Well it is not at least primarily for members' benefit; most of you know one another already. It is of course for visitors. So, then why not just make name tags for the visitors?

Well, besides perhaps causing some visitors to feel uncomfortable, as if they're being singled out, studies have found that new folks start to feel at home in a group not when people call them by name, but when they are able to call others by name. So, the new folks and visitors become able to say, "Good morning, Mary!" "Hi, Joe!"

Bartimaeus is one of the few recipients of Jesus' many healing miracles that we learn to call by name.

There's Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead (John 11:43–44), Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus cast out seven demons (Luke 8:2), Malchus, whose severed ear Jesus repaired (John 18:10; Luke 22:50–51), but not many others. Bartimaeus, we feel we get to know better even if we are only really calling him “the son of Timaeus.” And perhaps that makes us appreciate his healing more than we do for all those countless, nameless others whom Jesus healed.

But that's not at all what mattered to Bartimaeus. He didn't care whether we called him by name. What mattered to Bartimaeus was that he was able to call somebody else by name: ***“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”*** (Mark 10:47–48). What mattered to Bartimaeus was that he could call Jesus by name.

Not one of those multitudes whom Jesus healed was nameless to him; he knew them all. And he knows every single one of us by name. So, the great gift he's given each of us is the ability to call on his name, by name.

In our text today, Mark tells us about Jesus working a marvelous act of love, or I should say another marvelous act of love, restoring sight, for a man in need named Bartimaeus. A wonderful miracle! Surely a story worth telling.

But the fact is, Mark's account of Jesus healing this blind man quite significantly bookends with another story Mark tells, the story of Christ previously restoring sight to a different blind man. And the two stories are more than just doubling up a good thing. Both the subtle differences and, especially, what happens between the two miracles help us understand more clearly what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, help us see that the true disciple is the blind beggar who, by Jesus' mercy, follows in his way.

The true disciple was always first a blind beggar. It is no surprise that Mark would report two healings of blind men. Blindness is one evidence of the fallen creation that Old Testament prophets report again and again. Restoring sight to the blind, therefore, is among the most prominent signs of the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah lists it first: ***"Then the eyes of blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped."*** (Isaiah 35:5). It makes sense that Mark would feature it.

But by pairing Jesus' healing of Bartimaeus with his earlier healing of a blind man, Mark is also directing us to blindness as a spiritual metaphor.

Just before the earlier healing, the disciples had demonstrated an amazing lack of understanding about Jesus feeding five thousand and then four thousand. And Jesus had asked them, ***"Although you have eyes, do you not see?"*** (8:18). How often might Jesus ask us the same? Because of sin which has corrupted the entire creation we are blind, lost and wondering in the darkness. So often we fail to see Christ's reign and rule blessing our lives.

Not only Bartimaeus, then, but also Jesus' disciples and each of us can only beg for his mercy. Bartimaeus recognized this: ***"And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*** ⁴⁸***And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*** (vs 47–48).

Do we realize we were also blind beggars? But Jesus' mercy on the blind beggar restores sight. Jesus as the Messiah delights to extend God's mercy:

“And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.”⁵⁰ And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.⁵¹ And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.”⁵² And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.”

(vs 49–52).

Mercy was the basic plea of God’s people in the Old Testament: ***“But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.”*** (Psalm 86:15) Jesus calls Bartimaeus and immediately his sight is restored. Again, though, Mark suggests more. There’s again that matter of spiritual sight.

In the earlier miracle, the blind man was healed in two stages. When Jesus first acted, the man could see only vaguely, without clarity; clear vision came only with Jesus’ second touch. This time, Bartimaeus sees clearly immediately.

Mark is suggesting that, metaphorically, clear vision was impossible before (remember the disciples' blindness and ours) but now would be possible. The difference? Between the two healings, Jesus has predicted his Passion and resurrection three times in chapter 8:31; 9:31 and in chapter 10:33–34:

“saying, “we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

Mark is telling us that the coming of God's kingdom in Christ can only be seen clearly in light of Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the sight Christ wants us to gain to see that God's kingdom has come in him. It is what Bartimaeus has seen when Jesus says, ***“Your faith has healed (or saved) you”*** (v 52a). We also see clearly when we believe that Jesus' death on the cross has saved and healed us.

And the one who, now seeing, follows in Jesus' way that is the Lord's true disciple (v 52b). Jesus' two healings of blind men have enabled us to see what true discipleship is like.

It is exemplified by the beggar, who can offer nothing but can only receive.

It will mean carrying a cross as Jesus will carry a cross. ***“If someone desires to really follow after me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him proceed to follow me”*** (8:34). As true disciples we follow Jesus in this very way. Bartimaeus, the beggar, immediately follows Jesus on the way that will lead to Jerusalem and Jesus’ death. As true disciples, we will also follow Jesus as beggars, dependent on his mercy, on the road that will lead to our own sufferings. We live in a world that walks in darkness and hate; on our own we are lost in our blindness. We like the blind Bartimaeus need Jesus to restore our sight and us. Then we will celebrate the gift of life in heaven where our eyes will be always opened to the glory of God

Jesus wants no one to miss seeing that and Mark, under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, gives us what it takes to open our eyes. Amen.