

“Have Mercy & Teach Us to See!”  
B Pentecost 22, Mark 10:46-52  
October 24, 2021; 10:00 am  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

## **The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus (NRSV)**

<sup>46</sup> They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>48</sup> Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup> Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” <sup>50</sup> So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, <sup>[a]</sup>let me see again.” <sup>52</sup> Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

### **OPENING OF SERVICE:**

John Wurster, Presbyterian Pastor, sets the scene:

*The blind man is called Bartimaeus.* He sits in the dust outside of Jericho. Dust and darkness. That’s what his life is. He longs to see again. He remembers days gone by, bright colors and sunny days and faces. The memories are distant for him, obscured by the darkness, but they are not entirely gone. Bartimaeus longs to see again. He knows there could be something else, something more than dust and darkness.

He has heard people speak about Jesus, this man from Galilee who has been traveling in the area, making his way to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus has heard that this Jesus speaks about religion in a new

way. He speaks about love and forgiveness and compassion. He brings healing and hope and wholeness. His words and his touch make people well.

Jesus passes by the blind man Bartimaeus. As Bartimaeus becomes aware of it, he calls out for mercy, for healing. And Jesus hears him and responds to him and restores him. What happens when Bartimaeus can see again? He follows Jesus. He sees Jesus and he follows him. Call it a reformation. Bartimaeus was blind but then he sees. When he sees, he follows Jesus. So simple, yet so hard.

When he has the chance to respond to Jesus’ question, Bartimaeus voices a different kind of longing [than James and John wanting to see on Christ’s left and right hand].

Bartimaeus knows well what is missing in his life, and he asks Jesus to restore his sight. Maybe it is the authenticity of the request—here is someone who knows what he is asking. Or maybe it’s the humility of Bartimaeus. Or maybe it’s his direct, repeated and plaintive cry, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Maybe it’s some combination of all of those things; but Jesus is persuaded, moved and compelled by Bartimaeus, granting his request and connecting it to his faith.

### **I. HAVE MERCY ON US AND TEACH US TO SEE!**

“*What do you want me to do for you?!*” The same question was asked by Jesus to James and John when they took Jesus aside and made their impertinent and slightly self-serving request!

Here it seems a little odd—as if Jesus can’t tell by observing the destitute blind beggar sitting by the side of the road—what he needs to be restored to life and any decent kind of living.

Remember—there were no social safety nets in those days. Someone with disabilities, who had no bodily way to work and earn a wage, and possibly no family to take him in—had no options. This was it. Sitting by the side of the dusty road, in the heat of the day and the cold of the night, and beg. Hoping

someone—anyone—would take pity, have mercy—on him. Toss out a crumb. Offer a cool drink of water.

“**What do you want me to do for you?**” Jesus’ question rings through the air. The fact that that it IS so obvious, and yet Jesus dares to ask, makes one wonder if Jesus just might be going deeper—probing beneath the surface—asking the bigger questions of life—challenging the system, the status quo—the way of treating our neighbors that has resulted in this scene of desperation.

## **II. WHAT ABOUT US?!**

What do WE want Jesus to do for US?

As persons of faith; followers?

As a community of faith—a congregation; a church family?

What are we willing to *see*? Clearly?

What are we *unwilling* to see? Hesitant to open our eyes to? Admit, consider, explore, address, tackle head on? What are we *open* to pondering—honestly—together, or in the privacy of our own hearts?

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

We need a little help down here. I need some help. I’m down on my luck—it’s been a slow day of begging. There are shortages everywhere! Can’t you see, Jesus, times are rough?

If I could just be healed of this blindness, I could go get a job—there are plenty in the want ads. If things were just different....if I had a little help from my friends....if the economy would just turn around, if the people come back, and the offerings increase. If there were just more hours in a day! To work and love and serve the Lord and one another.

I don’t know about you, but I find myself exclaiming, “Lord, have MERCY!” a lot these days.

I’m not sure if I’m just talking to myself (I do that a lot, too!), or praying, or both.

## **III. HELP! THANKS! WOW!**

Author Anne Lamott says in her wise little book: There are really only three kinds of prayer. Help! Thanks! Wow!

Bart got the first one! Help! Jesus, have mercy on me!

“What do you need help with?” Jesus responds?

Bart: I want to see!!

And then—did you notice?—after Jesus restores his sight, we hear crickets. The verses stop. Where’s the Thanks?! Where’s the Wow?!

What happened to the dancing down the street, telling everyone you meet what the Lord has done for you?! In this story, unlike many others in the gospels, Jesus doesn’t have to tell Bart not to tell anyone! Doesn’t seem to be an issue!

Is he *ungrateful*? Is he not just blown away by the miracle that has just occurred in his life?! Or, is he dumbstruck, and just doesn’t even know what to say. Or shout or tell the world?!

## **IV. BART IS HUMAN, AFTER ALL**

Well, before we’re too hard on old Bartimaeus, maybe we should consider how often *we* remember the gratitude prayers after the asking pleas. Or, think about truly rejoicing and dancing down the street and shouting to all we meet after the Lord has done something amazing—or even just a minute miracle—for us?

It’s ever-so-possible that Blind Bartimaeus *does* give out a wow! And jump up and down for joy. Maybe that just got left out of the editor’s cuts in the Book of Mark.

What he *does* do, as he immediately receives his sight, is to *immediately* change his whole life and follow Jesus on the Way. This is much more than sauntering alongside him and his disciples on the physical, dirty, dusty road. To immediately leave your past life behind, drop everything, cut ties to family and community, and ease on down the road with Jesus was a complete, drastic and no-turning-back kind of life change!

And that's what he did. So, maybe we didn't *hear* him utter "Thanks" or "Wow." But maybe this complete commitment and jumping in with both feet is *much* more important. Life-changing. World-changing.

For Bart and the others who follow on the Way (which might just mean us, today), find a whole new way of being. Of following—not just a Person—but a movement, a message, a different way of moving in the world—living, loving and reacting *to* the world and everyone we meet.

It's the way of following an alternative path. A path, not about possessions and prestige; not about a ticket to Heaven—but about eternal life—a life of meaning in abundance and servanthood right here and now. Bart will find, on that way, that nothing he left behind truly matters, for he will find abundant and eternal, satisfying and meaningful *Life*. Capital L.

## **V. WHAT DID HE SEE?**

What did Bartimaeus, Son of Timaeus, *see* that he had not seen before? What did he see in Jesus of Nazareth—this itinerant Teacher and Healer with barely a decent pair of sandals and a pack on his back? What did he *sense* about this One—who encountered him along the road and changed his life forevermore?

What are *we* wanting to see more clearly? What's keeping us blind to what Jesus would have us know, hear, see with our own eyes? See with the opened-eyes of our hearts?

Jesus: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Jesus asks the question in every time and place. Jesus—the one in whose footsteps we follow—wants to know what concerns us, in the depths of our hearts and being. He hears our pleas, *has* mercy on us and knows the deep faith commitment and hope we bring to that cry for mercy and help.

Jesus knows how much we want to bring all that we are and have to the Table—and lay it down. That Great Gathering Table where everyone born has a place; is invited to pull up a seat.

Lord have mercy! Help us to see! Open our eyes wide open! Never to be *less* open again. Never to shut out the cries of friends and strangers alike. For they are urging us, like Bart's friends:

"He's calling for you! Get up! Stand Up! This is your moment to shine! Your cries of Help have been heard. Now it's time for the prayers of Thanks! and Wow! Amen.