

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ They spent some time in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town, trailed by his disciples and a parade of people, a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, he began to cry out, "Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder, "Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ Jesus stopped in his tracks. "Call him over." They called him. "It's your lucky day! Get up! He's calling you to come!" ⁵⁰ Throwing off his coat, he was on his feet at once and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Jesus said, "What can I do for you?" The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." ⁵² "On your way," said Jesus. "Your faith has saved and healed you." In that very instant he recovered his sight and followed Jesus down the road.

Helen Keller, so brave and inspiring to us in her deafness and blindness, once wrote a magazine article entitled: "Three days to see." In that article she outlined what things she would like to see if she were granted just three days of sight. It was a powerful, thought-provoking article. On the first day she said she wanted to see friends. Day two she would spend seeing nature. The third day she would spend in her home city of New York watching the busy city and the workday of the present. She concluded it with these words: "I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you were stricken blind."

As bad as blindness is in this century, it was so much worse for those souls in Jesus' day. Today a blind person at least has the hope of living a useful life with proper training. Some of the most skilled and creative people in our society are blind. But in first century Palestine blindness meant that you would be subjected to abject poverty. You would be reduced to begging for a living. You lived at the mercy and the generosity of others. Unless your particular kind of blindness was self-correcting, there was no hope whatsoever for a cure. The skills that were necessary were still centuries beyond the medical knowledge of the day.

There are things in this world that we enjoy looking at like the turning of the leaves in the autumn—a child laughing and playing and the familiar face of a friend we haven't seen in a very long time. There are things that we wish we had never seen like the rattlesnake I almost stepped on one time—a car accident that happens right before our eyes, the suffering of a loved. And then, there are things we hope never to see—perhaps the passing of a loved one. In today's story from the gospel of Mark, we are confronted with the question of our openness to really see all that God lays before us.

The story begins with Jesus and his disciples continuing their journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. All men twelve years and older living within a fifteen-mile radius of Jerusalem were expected to travel to the city for this celebration. But, as one might expect, it was not possible for everyone to make the trip. So, many of the streets in towns and villages (like Jericho where this story takes place) leading to the city would be lined with people, including priests and Levites, to see all who were making the trip, and to wish them well on their journey.

A man named Bartimaeus is introduced to us. He was a blind beggar sitting among the crowd along the road. It would seem the crowd noise must have gotten loud as Jesus was passing by the Bartimaeus, leading the beggar to inquire who was coming. When he heard it was Jesus, he began shouting, "Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!" The crowd tried to quiet him, but he was persistent, and he continued to shout, "Son of David, have pity on me!" Jesus must have

heard him. He stopped, and said, "Call him over." The crowd gave the blind man the good news and he rose, threw off his cloak, and was eager as they lead him to Jesus.

Because of his blindness, Bartimaeus had never seen Jesus, but he must have heard about him. He obviously knew that Jesus had the power to heal people. We know this because when Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus answered, "I want to see." Bartimaeus was desperate. He really wanted his sight and he believed Jesus was the one person who could make that possible. Figuratively and realistically speaking at the same time he wanted to see Jesus.

We might ask ourselves at this point, how desperate, how persistent are we in seeking Jesus, especially in our hour of need? We live in a culture where technology has provided us with almost instantaneous answers to our questions if we know how to use it. If we need to fix something, we can YouTube videos that will teach us how to do it. If we want a soda, we can put some money in a machine and, voila, it's delivered to us. You can pop something into a microwave and have an instant heated meal in just minutes rather than slaving over a hot stove to cook it.

Too often we get impatient when things do not happen as quickly as we want them too, and we give up or turn to other sources for solutions. It's not surprising then, if we stop and think about it, that we sometimes give up on God when things don't happen as quickly as we think they should. Maybe in those moments we don't really want to see Jesus; we just want the hurdles in our lives eliminated immediately if not sooner.

Bartimaeus' blindness did not befall him the day before Jesus showed up in Jericho. We don't know how long he had been blind, but it was long enough to establish himself as a beggar, which leads me to think it had been for quite some time. Over the years, I suspect he offered many prayers to God requesting healing.

Bartimaeus' persistent desperate cries to Jesus were a culmination to his prayers. He recognized it as such because he believed Jesus could heal him. If we believe that God wants and indeed has the ability to help us, we will pray with persistence.

Our prayers, like the cries of Bartimaeus, may even reach the level of desperation, which is not necessarily a bad thing. Desperation, when directed towards God, indicates that we recognize our helplessness and our need for God's help. Our feelings of desperation welcome the openness we need to see God at work in our lives. Unfortunately, many who reach this point, are uncomfortable with these feelings, seeing it as a sign of weakness, because they want to be in control of their lives, and once again, they give up on God and turn to other things for solutions to their problems.

Perhaps a more perplexing question facing us is, do we really want his help when we are in need? We might wonder, why wouldn't anyone want Jesus' help? The scriptures tell us that we don't always get what we want like Bartimaeus did. So, maybe we are afraid we will be one of those who won't get what we want, and the thought of being let down is too overwhelming.

Or maybe, we are subconsciously afraid of receiving what we want or one of the other possibilities of God's answers to our pleas, leaving us in the lurch of facing an unknown future. Think about it, did Bartimaeus truly understand how gaining his sight would change his life? Yes, he would see all the wonderful things he had been missing. He would be able to navigate his way without the help of others. He would be independent, able to do things he only dreamed of doing. But did he recognize the new responsibilities this would require of him? He knew one way of life, and now he would need to start over, making a new life for himself.

The thought of change, even good change in our lives can be exciting, but it also can be scary. Relationships may change, as well as our responsibilities and others' expectations of us.

For this reason, sometimes, subconsciously perhaps, people truly do not want Jesus' help and healing in their lives. They don't want to see or hear Jesus calling out to them, "Come to me, and let me help you." It may be, that if we dig deep and are honest with ourselves, we may be surprised to find that this is something holding us back from seeing Jesus and receiving his help.

There's something else to note from this story. We read that Bartimaeus addressed Jesus as the "Son of David." This was a Messianic title, but it encompassed all the trappings associated with being a mighty warrior, a conqueror who would come and free the Jews from their oppressors. This indicates to us that Bartimaeus had an inadequate understanding of who Jesus was. Yet he had faith. He believed that Jesus could heal him.

You see, we don't need to understand everything about Jesus. We don't need to raise ourselves to a certain Christian standard for Jesus to hear us. We don't need to be perfect, even though we might think so. Some people create all kinds of misguided ideas and standards they must reach in order to receive Jesus's attention and care. That's bogus thinking.

Jesus did not tell Bartimaeus that he was healed because he had all the right theology. He said it was the blind man's faith that healed him. Please understand, however, that having faith not only means believing that God will do something for us when we ask him to, but even more it means trusting God even though it may mean that we don't get what we want, trusting that we remain in God's hands because he does care for us, therefore, trusting that God knows what is best for us.

Bartimaeus' story does not end with his healing. He was grateful, so much so that he followed Jesus on the road. He saw Jesus for the first time; and although he did not have all the right theology and understanding of who Jesus was, he became a disciple of Jesus.

We all experience blindness from time to time, not physical blindness, but spiritual blindness. The world around us may seem to be falling apart, our personal lives may somehow become shattered and broken, our bodies may become weary and/or sick; and overwhelmed by it all we just can't see Jesus. We can't hear him calling to us to come to him so that he can help us.

Our oldest son, Nick and his wife Vicki have a heart for rescuing Boston Terrier dogs. The first Boston they rescued; they drove all the way to Georgia to get. There was something about this particular dog that made them feel they just had to have her. Her name was Tinker. We all called her Tink. Tink was an older dog, and she was blind.

But what she lacked because of her physical handicap, was made up by her strong spirit to survive. With the nurturing and love that Nick and Vicki she became strong and independent. If you didn't look at her eyes or otherwise know better, you might have thought nothing was wrong with her.

She ran and played like other dogs who could see. She didn't seem afraid to try most anything. If the kids saw she seemed to lose her direction, or that she was heading towards a run-in with a wall, a tree or anything that was not going to give if she hit it, they would simply call out to her, and she would listen and respond to their command to turn a different direction.

In spite of their best efforts sometimes, Tink had a painful encounter with an immovable object. Yet Tink continued to trust them. She had a great life. She was blind physically, but her spirit was not.

May we overcome our blindness, and really see Jesus, as we rise in faith to his voice calling us to come to him. Amen.