

## Eyes that see (Mark 10: 46-52)

### ***The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus***

*46 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.*

*47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' 49 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.' 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.*

*51 Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' 52 Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.*

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## Commentary

This is the second occasion in a short space of time on which Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” The first is in response to a request from James and John (10:35-6); the second is in response to the desperate call of blind Bartimaeus: “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (10:47). The location is important: it’s the last significant stopping place before arrival at Jerusalem. Mark, remember, uses geography symbolically. The steep ascent from the Galilee to Jerusalem – the occasion for Jesus teaching his disciples about the Way of the Cross – mirrors the climb up Golgotha to crucifixion and death. These stopping places are the stations of the cross: time to pause and enter into the enormity of what is happening. It is the road of discipleship – the place of following. The further they travel it, the more the discipleship narrative unravels. The closer they draw to Jerusalem, the stiffer the resistance of The Twelve to the Way of the Cross becomes. And here, in the last stopping place before Jerusalem, the nature of true discipleship is shown, not through Jesus’ teaching, but through an encounter with a man who has become blind.

### **From the gutter-dweller to hero of faith**

Here’s Mark at his subversive best: a marginalised, blind beggar, sitting in the dust,

unnoticed by the excited crowd, is heard by Jesus. In the hubbub of excitement, the excited chatter and the shouts, the voice that Jesus hears is the one the crowds are trying to silence.

Look at v48. The people “sternly ordered” (epetimōn autō) Bartimaeus to be quiet. That’s the same word that is used when Mark describes the disciples’ attempts to prevent the people bringing their children to Jesus (10:13). See the pattern? The would-be door-keepers around Jesus – the “bouncers” – try to decide who is worthy to approach Jesus. In each case, the incident follows a discussion about greatness. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus has used a child to deconstruct notions of greatness. Here, immediately after James’ and John’s request, we find a blind beggar – someone isolated socially, spiritually and, in this incident, physically. He’s literally sitting behind a wall of people who stand between him and Jesus, unable to “see” Jesus on two counts: the crowds block his view, and, of course, because he’s blind! He’s voiceless too – not because he *cannot* shout, but because the people do not *allow* his voice to be heard. They address him with a “stern rebuke” to be quiet – just as an exorcist would address a demon.

Just as Jesus has earlier told the would-be gatekeepers to allow the children to come to him, and told them (shockingly) that the kingdom, in fact, *belongs* to them, and that any would-be disciple (as opposed to gatekeeper!) needs to *become* like them, so now Jesus “stands still” and calls Bartimaeus to him.

What is the significance of Jesus “standing still”? The point is that he has *stopped* – on the way to Jerusalem. This is a “station of the cross”. It’s a clue for the readers: Jesus is about to teach us more about the nature of discipleship and the Way of the Cross. What is shocking is that Jesus’ “teaching” here consists in *hearing* the voice the crowds are trying to muzzle and demanding that they make visible the very person they are trying to make invisible (“Call him here”). What is Jesus teaching his disciples? Actually, nothing! This is *not* an instance of Jesus drawing The Twelve aside and teaching them about the Way of the Cross! 10:42-45 is the last time that Jesus teaches his disciples about the Way. Here, Jesus doesn’t teach. He heals. And

the healed blind beggar ends up “following Jesus on the Way” (10:52).

What’s going on here? Jesus’ teaching on the Way of the Cross finishes with “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (10:45). Bartimaeus shows two things: firstly, he shows clearly that the disciples have not understood what Jesus is on about! Bartimaeus is one of the people they try to exclude. He isn’t reckoned to be among “the many” for whom Jesus will give his life. Yet *his* is the voice that Jesus hears. He “stops” in Jericho only for this man – in response to the cry for help. The Way of the Cross is “bad news” for those who, like the rich man, have everything invested in the status quo. To those like Bartimaeus, excluded and unwanted, the Son of Man comes as a servant. The message of the kingdom is a gift, to be accepted with joy.

Secondly, we’re clearly supposed to understand that Bartimaeus is a true disciple of the Way of the Cross. Jesus doesn’t call him – in fact, he sends him on his way. Bartimaeus *chooses* to follow him. At the same time, the disciples whom Jesus has called have failed to understand. They will *accompany* Jesus to Jerusalem, but their abandonment of him shows that they are not “followers”. Mark, in other words, portrays Jesus as having “stopped” on two levels: he has (literally) “stopped” on his journey, and he has “stopped” teaching The Twelve about the Way. There is nothing left to say. The disciples have “seen” the Way, but remain wilfully blind to it. There is nothing left for Jesus to teach. He is not going to change their minds. So, rather than have Jesus say more about the Way, Mark portrays this as incident in which true discipleship is *enacted* – by a blind man who *yearns* to see.

Mark portrays Bartimaeus, therefore, as a role model; a summary of all that Jesus has been trying (unsuccessfully) to teach The Twelve. He belongs in the same category as the children whom the disciples try to keep from Jesus: the marginalised, excluded people whom society considers worthless and who are “the first” in kingdom terms. In contrast to the rich man who cannot abandon his possessions, Bartimaeus throws aside his only possession (his cloak) in order to get to Jesus (10:50). He does so gladly! And, unlike the disciples who are wilfully blind to the

Way of the Cross, he desperately wants to see.

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

Look at where Mark places this pericope in the narrative. On the one side it is bounded by the request of James and John for power. On the other, Mark places the Triumphal Entry. It’s important to look the implication of the narrative structure here.

*“My teacher, let me see again”*

Jesus asks both the brothers and Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” The brothers ask something that Jesus is unable to give: power. Power is not Jesus’ to give, because Jesus has renounced the way of power in embracing the Way of the Cross. Their request shows that the brothers are blind to who Jesus is. Bartimaeus, by contrast, asks for what Jesus *can* give: mercy and sight. “Have mercy” is answered by Jesus’ “Call him here.” “What do you want me to do for you?” “Let me see again” is answered by Jesus’ pronouncement: “Your faith has made you well”.

Note, too, that *both* the brothers and Bartimaeus address Jesus as “teacher”. This isn’t accidental. Jesus has been teaching them about the Way of the Cross. The disciples, however, haven’t been learning! That is why they ask for something Jesus cannot give. Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as “my teacher”. It’s very personal. Bartimaeus has *learned* from Jesus. But what has he learned, and how? He has heard about Jesus – about the healings, exorcisms and the shocking stuff Jesus has been saying about the least being first. And because he *is* one of the least, he has “learned” about the God Jesus is revealing. Jesus’ God is a God of love and mercy. Hence he understands that Jesus has come, not to condemn him, but to serve him, and give his life as a ransom for him. He recognises the gift.

*Son of David, have mercy on me”*

In the following pericope, the people hail Jesus as the Son of David. The title’s right, but they’ve got the content wrong. They see “Son of David” as a designation of

power. Bartimaeus sees it as affirmation of grace – that God’s messiah comes bearing the kingdom as an undreamed of gift! Even though everyone else thinks Bartimaeus has no right to try and involve Jesus in his life, Bartimaeus *knows* that it’s okay to call out to Jesus – because Jesus is the King of Mercy! Bartimaeus, in other words, is here not only as an example of discipleship: it is *his* acclamation of Jesus as king that is the *true* reception of Jesus. Jesus is going to Jerusalem as king – but the people do not recognise what sort of king. Bartimaeus does!

### **Not missing the point ...**

Today’s gospel passage is saturated in symbol. It’s a brilliant piece of narrative construction, and once you start seeing the links, it’s difficult to stop! However, the cleverness of the narrative mustn’t be allowed to distract from the fact that this is also an intensely human drama! This is a story of a blind man who has given up all hope of seeing again. He is in reduced circumstances: he has lost his sight, and with it his place in the order of things. He is a nobody. It’s easy to imagine how hard he has had to fight against “If only ...” – in that way lies bitterness and despair.

But he has heard about Jesus of Nazareth. Like a starving man, he has wolfed down the stories of Jesus’ healings and extraordinary care for people – people like him! And now he hears that Jesus is in town – is about to pass the very place where he’s sitting! The “if onlys” come in full flood! If only he can get to Jesus! If only Jesus will hear him ... and stop ... and ...”

We ought to imagine his desperation – the desperation that makes him flout convention, risk angering the very people on whose handouts his life is utterly dependent, and which makes him just keep on shouting louder and louder, “Jesus! Son of David! Please! Over here – have mercy on me!”

And we ought to imagine being Bartimaeus – being led to Jesus; being told to take courage because he’s calling ... *for him!* And then hearing those words from the lips of Jesus: “Tell me, what is it you want me to do for you?” Those words from the lips of the only man who can actually *do* what Bartimaeus wants with all his soul!

And let's imagine him opening his eyes – seeing again for the first time in God knows how many years – and seeing Jesus. Yes, let's look at the narrative and see how cleverly constructed it is; how deep; how it articulates so much of what Jesus is teaching. But let's hear the story with our hearts, because it's meant to be heard like that. Let's, with Bartimaeus, open our eyes and “see” Jesus! And let's respond with the same abandon and joy!

### Going deeper into the text (Mark 10: 46-52)

*Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again. (Mark 10:51)*

Moral courage has its source in the capacity to perceive through the eyes of God's love, to feel for the other and the self with divine compassion, and to know divine grief and wrath over injustice. We all have rare moments of seeing clearly, moments when we know profoundly that every human being and, indeed, every living thing is sacred.

In these moments of light we comprehend that all people are created in the image of God to live as part of God's love, justice, and peace. All are created for abundant life. Yet how brief and intermittent are these moments! Usually our vision is dulled by the details of daily life, the tasks before us, our fears or desires.

In your mind, walk through your daily or weekly routine. Think slowly and deliberately about the people whose lives regularly touch your own. Think about the places you go—home, work, school.

- Do you commute to work in a car or on public transportation?
- Do you travel often?

- What information do you receive about the world we live in, and through what media?
- Do you read news- papers, listen to radio talk shows, watch television?
- Are you on the Internet?

Now think about what or whom you see as you move around.

- Do you interact with homeless people or beggars?
- Do you live with poverty?
- What do you know about Rwanda, Afghanistan, Chiapas, East Timor, or about Native Americans, inner-city schools, global warming, or labour conditions in the plants that manufacture your clothes?

One of the characteristics of the age in which we live is that we no longer can say, "We didn't know." Ordinary people have access to information from all around the world. In some ways we are overloaded with information and images. But:

- Do we see?
- And do we understand?
- Do we ask why?
- Do we question the bias of our own line of vision?
- Are we willing to open our minds and hearts to the implications of what we see?

Jesus gives sight beyond seeing.

- How often have we reflected upon the gifts of the Spirit, especially wisdom, understanding, and knowledge?
- Have we got the courage to accept these gifts that give us frightening yet healing insight about the way our world looks?

***We pray:*** Jesus, "let us see again". Let us see through your eyes of love, so that we might follow you on the Way.

Amen.

## All age worship ideas (Mark 10: 46-52)

One of the keys to good all age worship is to keep it simple and relatively short. Ideally aim for a service of 45-50 minutes. That's not to say a service can't be longer but if you are thinking of 1hr30+ think carefully about your use of space and above all else be creative, take risks and have fun – partying is integral to the kingdom but we'll leave that for a year on Luke...

### *Reflection*

There are some people who are afraid to let go of being the victim but not Bartimaeus. He knows that there is injustice that keeps him begging on the street. He does not want to be where he is. He cannot earn because he cannot see. There are those who would deem his blindness due to some sin or other but either way the Law that commands those like Bartimaeus should be cared for and provided for is ignored. So he must beg. Then comes Jesus.

Bartimaeus in his blindness sees what the disciples have failed to fully grasp and the teachers of the law have tried to dismiss. He calls to Jesus and uses a messianic title that Jesus will seek to distance himself from in other chapters but for now it serves this situation well because it presents a powerful model of discipleship. Bartimaeus believes in who Jesus is, even with limited perception, and in what Jesus can do.

Even though there are those who try to silence the voice of this vulnerable, worthless man it is exactly because he is vulnerable and worthless in the world's eyes that the kingdom has come and so Jesus calls him over. He will always make time for those who need him most.

Bartimaeus sees the possibility of life, of being able to see, and he literally runs at it. And his faith is rewarded. His sight is returned and he immediately follows the man

who has given him back his life even though it is a road that will likely lead to death. This is discipleship.

### ***Ideas***

Dramatise the reading either using the Dramatized Bible if you have a copy or by inviting someone to speak Bartimaeus words and others to be those who called him to 'shut up' and 'be quiet'. Invite everyone to close their eyes and to keep them closed through the reading. Invite the congregation to imagine they are on the dusty road outside the ancient city of Jericho. Don't tell them that other people will share in the reading. As you read from the front have Bartimaeus to one side and the voice of the silencers on the other. Use people who have loud voices. When Bartimaeus is called over he should move to the front. Once the reading has finished begin a conversation:

- Ask people how it felt not being able to see but hearing different voices?
- How might Bartimaeus have felt? Perhaps ask the one who did the voice how they felt.
- Why do you think people told him to be quiet?
- Are there people we would prefer to be quiet?
- What if someone came in to our service asking for Jesus or asking for prayer to be healed – how might we feel then? How would we respond?
- What things do we think stop people from seeing Jesus today?
- What could we do to make Jesus more visible?

A useful game that can lead into the reading is the 'Who am I?' game where you have 10 clues to the identity of a person and people have to see if they can guess. Perhaps split the congregation into teams to make it competitive and make sure you have people and characters that any younger participants will know

It would need to be handled sensitively but if you have someone who is visually impaired in your congregation invite them to share what being a follower of Jesus

means to them.

### **Prayer**

Prime some people with newspapers and ask them to find stories where it is difficult to see God – obviously you may need to be sensitive to the range of people gathered – and instances of good news. If you can't find any in the newspapers it may be worth getting hold of a copy of this magazine: <https://www.positive.news>

You could also get hold of Christian Aid or Tearfund magazines with good news stories from around the world as well as Christianity, Reform, GEAR or Ship of Fools publications and websites that might have more home-based stories.

Use both stories where it seems God is absent and where God is present to shape the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession.

## **Liturgies and hymns (Mark 10: 46-52)**

This is where you can find hymn suggestions and liturgies for use with this week's text.

*Our passage this morning lends itself to more than one voice, here is an example using the message translation and how it might be done:*

**Narrator** 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. When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, he began to cry out,

**Bartimaeus** "Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!"

**Narrator** Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder,

**Bartimaeus** "Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!"

**Narrator Jesus** stopped in his tracks. And said

**Jesus** “Call him over.”

**Narrator** they called him. “It’s your lucky day! Get up! He’s calling you to come!”

Throwing off his coat, he was on his feet at once and came to Jesus.

<sup>51</sup> **Jesus**, “What can I do for you?”

**Bartimaeus** , “Rabbi, I want to see.”

**Jesus** <sup>52</sup> “On your way,” “Your faith has saved and healed you.”

**Narrator** In that very instant he recovered his sight and followed Jesus down the road.

Here are two prayers inspired by Jesus’ healing of the blind beggar, Bartimaeus

O Jesus Christ, teacher and healer,  
You heard the cry of the blind beggar  
When others would have silenced him.  
Teach us to be persistent in prayer  
And give us courage to ask plainly  
What we need from you,  
That we might respond in your name  
By the power of the Spirit  
Through the ministry entrusted to us  
For the sake of the gospel.  
Amen.

O Jesus Christ, teacher and healer,  
You heard the cry of the blind beggar  
When others would have silenced him.  
Teach us to be attentive  
To the voices others ignore,  
That we might respond  
Through the power of the Spirit  
To heal the afflicted  
And to welcome the abandoned  
For your sake and the sake of the gospel. Amen.

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<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>)

### **Prayer of Intercession**

(inspired by Mark 10:46-52, Job 42, Hebrews 7:23-28)

Heavenly Father, like Job, when we ask for your presence and intervention, we will end up on knees, astounded at your greatness, and humbled by our own unworthiness.

**Loving God, you hear our prayers:** You live among us.

Holy Spirit, when we tearfully share our hopes and dreams with you, you promise a harvest of joy. Fill us with expectations of your goodness.

**Loving God, you hear our prayers:** You live among us.

Lord Jesus Christ, high priest and intercessor for our sins, help us live as your children, trusting that we are also children of the Heavenly Father.

**Loving God, you hear our prayers:** You live among us.

Lord Jesus, healer of Bartimaeus' blindness, help us see you in this world active in love, and help us see you by our side, so we may walk your way without stumbling.

**Loving God, you hear our prayers:** You live among us.

Lord Jesus, Great Physician, hear now the names of those we know who need your healing.

**Loving God, you hear our prayers:** You live among us.

**The love of God has won. The new life has begun. Amen.**

(Written by Paul Sauer. Posted on the **Lutheran Forum** website.<http://www.lutheranforum.org/>)