

Blind or Blind? Mark 10: 46-52

One of the most common fears for children and adults alike is the fear of the dark, and those of us with the ability to use our eyes to see the light of this world can only imagine how difficult it would be to live in total darkness 24-7. Even so, consider for a moment the number of famous blind people and their contributions to society. Claude Monet became blind late in life yet continued to paint some of the most beautiful and expensive paintings in the world. Helen Keller was blind and deaf, and later went on to obtain a college degree and become a political activist. A slave woman named Harriet Tubman was blinded by an injury early in life, yet she became one of the most famous abolitionists and conductors of the Underground Railroad in history. A few members of a long list of famous blind musicians include Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, Jose Feliciano, and Ronnie Millsap. Fannie Crosby wrote more than 8000 hymns, even though she was blinded by a phony doctor 6 weeks after she was born.

We just heard the story of another blind person, a certain man named Bartimaeus. Though his name may not be found on many lists of famous blind people, it should be at the top, for his incredible story is found in the best-selling book of all time, the Bible. The fact is that we are still learning from him this morning, even though he lived more than 2000 years ago. He was a real person, one with a story so important that it is found in three of the four Gospels. Mathew, Mark, and Luke all record a similar account of his amazing encounter with the most famous person in human history-a man named Jesus.

Bartimaeus was not just blind, he was also poor. In Jesus day, there were no government programs like disability or Social Security to help folks like him. Unable to earn a living, he, and others like him would gather on the heavily travelled roads leading in and out of the cities and literally beg passersby for a handout. Today this practice continues, especially in popular tourist cities like Jerusalem. In my mind's eye, I still can see the face of an elderly woman I once saw begging for coins outside one of the gates of old Jerusalem. It is challenging enough to be blind but having to beg for food and other necessities makes it even worse.

At first glance it appears Bartimaeus had nothing. He had no sight, no means of earning a living and perhaps most important of all he had no dignity. He had to rely completely on the compassion of others in order to survive. It was a miserable existence, and to say the least it must have been a struggle to start each day anew. And even though Bartimaeus was blind, he still sensed the great number of people who simply walked by without acknowledging his presence, let alone offer him a shekel or denarii for his trouble. But then one day everything changed. The Bible records in verse 47 that he heard a great crowd approaching from a distance. Though he couldn't see who it was, when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth and some of His followers, he began to cry out. Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.

Let's stop there for just a moment and process this information. First, it sure sounds like he knew who Jesus was. **Jeremiah 23:5** He believed Jesus was the Son of David, the one anointed with oil, the long-awaited Messiah, the one the prophets said would come to rule the Jewish people and build the kingdom of God. For nearly three years he had heard bits and pieces of the story of Jesus, the One with miraculous power to heal and cure. Even though he couldn't physically see Him, he still knew who Jesus was. Perhaps someone had already told him of other blind people Jesus had cured, wanting to give him hope. So even though at first glance it might appear that Bartimaeus had nothing, he did have something. He had faith that Jesus would help him.

Bartimaeus was blind, but his faith certainly wasn't.

What happens next is so very relevant to Bartimaeus's story, yet it is something you and I might easily fail to see. It is the reaction of the multitudes, the masses, the crowd that was travelling with Jesus. Verse 48- then many warned him to be quiet. It wasn't just a "be quiet we can't hear the TV" it was "shut up before we come over there and do it for you". Like a parent embarrassed by a child crying during the sermon they did their best to quiet the man down. They were nothing like the friends of that lame man who fought the crowds and ripped a hole in the roof of a house in Capernaum to lower his cot into the room where Jesus was. These people acted as if Bartimaeus wasn't even there that day.

The question is why? There are several possibilities. In Biblical days, illness or physical infirmity was often thought to be a divine judgment for sin of some sort. They didn't think Bartimaeus was worthy of Jesus time. Maybe they had their own list of needs and were not willing to take a back seat to a blind beggar. Or, in light of all that they had heard from Jesus, perhaps they were just plain ashamed that He might see just how awful the blind man was being cared for. In the end, it didn't matter what they thought, for Bartimaeus shouted out even louder and soon Jesus heard his plea.

Jesus would have none of it. He brought the caravan to a screeching halt and commanded those in the crowd to call the blind man. In other words, Jesus rebuked the crowd and said open your eyes, can't you see the man is blind? Allow him to come to me! Perhaps Bartimaeus was not the only person whose eyes were opened that day. Even though he is not here this morning Bartimaeus offers us some very practical advice. **Nothing must come between us and our faith in Jesus.** We believe in the truth, and we will not be silenced by those who don't.

Throwing aside his dirty and tattered garment, Bartimaeus approaches Jesus. Notice that Jesus asked him the same question that he asked of James and John a few days earlier when they came to Him with their request to be seated at his right and left hand in the kingdom. What do you want me to do for you? Their requests were very different. James and John wanted the best seats in heaven and the blind man wanted his sight. James and John wanted honor and recognition, while the blind man wanted dignity and self-respect. Jesus also responded very differently. Two of His closest disciples were told no, and the blind beggar was told yes.

His request was honored, and he was given his sight. Jesus told him to "Go your way- your faith has made you well". Other translations render Jesus words as "your faith has made you whole" or "your faith has saved you", both implying spiritual healing as well as physical. The Bible says the man received his sight and followed Jesus on the road, demonstrating his gift of faith in yet another way. **He put his faith into action.**

The truth of the matter is that Bartimaeus was not the only blind person on the streets of Jericho that day. It is painfully obvious that many in the crowd of people following Jesus were more blind than Bartimaeus. They could see the color of Jesus's eyes, the color of His hair and the callouses on His hands that cured the sick and raised the dead; yet they were blind to the basic needs of the man begging at their feet. Even worse, they were blind to the truth that Jesus could help him. There is blindness and then there is blindness. Physical blindness may keep us from seeing things on earth, but **spiritual blindness will keep us from seeing heaven**. One is temporary, and without a cure the other will have more permanent affects.

Depending upon the circumstances of the day, we might be like the blind beggar named Bartimaeus, lost in the crowd and crying out in faith and desperation to a Jesus we have heard about and believe in but can't see. Or we might be like the other beggars in the crowd there that day, blinded by selfish desires. If you are like me, you will admit to being like both. The good news is that the God we serve is and always will be a God of grace, mercy, and forgiveness, a God of new opportunities.

It seems that little has changed in the 2000 some years since Bartimaeus received his sight. There are still those with great physical infirmities and there is a host of others with a different kind of infirmity, a spiritual blindness that is much less obvious but even more troubling. They don't know Jesus. Our mission has not changed. It remains two-fold. **We meet the needs of the needy, and we bring those living in darkness to Jesus.**

Let us continue to pray for strength, courage, and grace and for eyes to be opened anew so that all the world might see and know Jesus. Amen