

Do you see. . .
Mark 10:46-52
October 28, 2018 – Reformation Sunday

It's a simple story, only seven verses. A blind man named Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, and he began to shout. Jesus called him over, restored his sight, and the man began to follow Jesus on the way. It's a simple healing story, one of many healing stories in the Gospels. But wait, maybe this story is not as simple as it first appears.

You see, I have repeatedly preached that we should not always read the Bible in small snippets. In fact, last Lent, I challenged the members of this congregation, sometime during Lent, to read the Gospel of Mark in its entirety in one sitting. It will take about an hour and a half. Indeed, all the Gospels, but most especially Mark, should be considered as one integral unit; and blindness is one of the "subthemes" in the Gospel.

Let's back up a bit, to Mark, Chapter Eight. Chapter Eight is a pivotal chapter. Half way through the Gospel, it's the first time that Jesus predicts his impending passion, death, and resurrection. Chapter Eight begins with Jesus' feeding of the Four Thousand; and shortly thereafter the disciples are complaining that they have no bread. As I stated a few months back, the feeding stories are not about food for the stomach, any more than our Sacrament of Holy Communion is about food for the stomach. No, the feeding stories are about food for the soul. I, somewhat tongue in cheek, called it soul food. It's spiritual nourishment. It's sustenance and nutrition for our souls. It's the food that supports eternal life. But the disciples just don't "get it." They are just plain hungry; and they begin talking about their lack of bread. And what does Jesus respond? "Do you have eyes but fail to see? Do you not yet understand?"

This story is immediately followed by the healing of another blind man at Bethsaida. Jesus laid hands on the man, and he saw everything clearly. What did he see? Everything! What did he see? Jesus, the Son of God. What did he see? The whole world, everything? And now, just a few chapters later, Jesus heals another blind man – Bartimaeus.

There are two very important things in the Bartimaeus story. First, to what is Bartimaeus' healing attributed? To faith. Jesus does not say, "I have healed you." Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well." Faith. . . Your faith has made you well. Your faith in Jesus has healed you.

Now, perhaps it's a good time to draw a distinction. As I stated a few weeks ago, I do not dismiss the fact that miracle cures do sometimes seem to happen; and also draw a distinction between healing and curing. We cure disease; we heal souls. I have met some very healthy people on their death beds, people in love

with God, people at peace with Christ, people seeking to share agape love to their absolute limits. And so, when Mark speaks of the blind man seeing clearly or the faith of Bartimaeus healing him, I think he's speaking of more than ophthalmology. I can see clearly now! It's clear to me now. I'm no longer in the dark. Jesus asks the disciples, "Do you have eyes by fail to see?" and he tells Bartimaeus, "Your faith has healed your blindness."

But the second key to the story, is the conclusion: "He regained his sight and followed him on the way." I've stated before that early Christians were called "followers in the way," the way of Jesus, the way of the Gospel, the way of Christian life. So you see the contrast, Jesus asks the disciples, "Do you still not see? Do you still not understand?" But Bartimaeus follows "on the way."

Now, I cannot let this day go by without recognizing that this is Reformation Sunday. This is the Sunday before All Hallows Eve. This is the day we celebrate a monk named Martin Luther nailing 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg; and with that act, the Protestant Church was born in Europe. Now there's a lot contained in those 95 theses, but Luther's primary issue with the church was its sale of indulgences. The clergy were literally selling "tickets to heaven," in part for personal gain and in part to pay for the building of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. And this lowly Catholic Monk said, "No!" No, you can't buy your way into heaven.

Folks, we are in the midst of our Stewardship Campaign; and, I encourage you to support your church to the best of your ability. Support your church because you love your church, and because you believe in the work of the church. Support your church because you are thankful for the many blessings that God has given you. But I will NOT tell you that you will gain a faster route to heaven by supporting your church. Our merciful and loving God just doesn't work that way.

So Luther said, "No, no, no. . . You don't get to heaven by your deeds. You don't get to heaven but giving a lot of money or be doing good works." No, you get to heaven by your faith. Jesus told Bartimaeus, "Your faith has made you will." But what did Bartimaeus do? Once he was healed, he followed, which brings us to John Wesley. John Wesley said, "Luther had it right. We earn salvation by faith alone; but, if our faith is genuine, we will do good works." The good works, the sharing, the caring, the giving will not earn you extra points with God, but if you have faith, all those other things will naturally happen. And so "immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed him on the way."

What about you? What about me? What about each of us? Are we the disciples, wanting to follow Jesus, leaving our boats behind to follow Jesus, but still blind to the mission, still looking for food for our stomachs, still not understanding the really story, the real love of the passion, the death, and the

resurrection; or are we Bartimaeus, having the faith to shout out, “Jesus, master, have mercy on me,” and having the faith to see clearly and follow in the way.

And finely, we must again ask, “How do we follow? What does God want me to do? How much does God want me to give? Where does God want me to go?” And my answer is the same as always – we pray? We briefly ask the questions, then we quietly and patiently listen to God. Oh, it probably won’t be an audible voice ringing from some mountain top. It’s more likely to be a little whisper in the back of your head telling you, “This is what you should do. This is what you should give. This is what you should say. This is how you should express your love.” Listen! Listen to the voice. Then open your eyes to see the wonders of God, and follow in the way, wherever God leads.

Let us pray. . .

Most Holy Lord,
Open our eyes that we may see clearly.
and give us the faith to follow, wherever you lead.
Amen.

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