

Jeremiah 31:7-10

⁷For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel." ⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. ⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶They 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. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then 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." ⁵²Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

"My Teacher, Let Me See."

1. There's a bumper sticker common to cars owned by Christians who prescribe to what is known as "rapture" theology, the belief that the "true" Christians will be whisked off the face of the planet as the world falls into utter darkness, and to advertize their confidence that they are among the chosen few, they sport these bumper stickers that read, "In case of rapture, this car will be unmanned." Of course this slogan has prompted quite a few "responsive" bumper stickers, my favorite being, "In case of rapture, can I have your car?" Though I do take the Bible very seriously, you can probably tell that I'm not a big fan of rapture theology, which like some other theologies, is more of a distraction from what I consider to be the very straightforward message of Jesus that is found in the Bible, a message that is really quite clear but so hard for us to embrace. You remember a few weeks ago we had the verse from the book of Hebrews in our Epistle lesson: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. Much of what we read in the Bible is easy to understand. It's just hard to apply it to our lives.
2. That's one of the key messages we get in the Gospel of Mark; just how hard it is for just about everyone to embrace Jesus' message and to follow him. The leaders in Mark's Gospel don't like him, the crowd turns on him, and the disciples abandon him. And so I'm glad that today we have this story of Bartimaeus, because Bartimaeus is one of the few people who shows that he gets it. This morning we'll look a little closer at Bartimaeus and see if we what we can learn from him about faith and discipleship , and my prayer is that we would assess our own discipleship in light of Bartimaeus' example, ask for healing for ourselves, and commit ourselves to taking the steps necessary to

improve our faith and to walk a bit closer to our Lord, because we can all afford to walk closer with the Lord, Amen?

3. The first thing that strikes us about Bartimaeus is that he is a blind beggar, and it is his blindness that has led him to begging. The reason the blind were usually beggars was because there's wasn't much else they *could* do. No one would hire them, and there was no government assistance, so they depended upon public charity. They also depended upon the goodness of others not to rob them of what little they were able to collect for their needs. They were completely vulnerable. It was not a good life. To have sight would really give Bartimaeus new life.
4. But this story is not really so much about Jesus healing a man who is physically blind. There are, as we know, two kinds of blindness that afflict us; there is *physical* blindness and there is *spiritual* blindness. We just sang "Amazing Grace" which has that very *amazing* line, "I once was lost, but now I'm found; was *blind* but now I *see*." The author was once blind to God's forgiving grace, but now is able to *see* God's love and forgiveness, and his life is now restored. The Gospel of Mark describes Bartimaeus as *physically* blind, but there are clues that the writer uses to show us that Bartimaeus is not as blind as we might think, and that most of the other characters we meet in Mark's gospel *are not only spiritually blind* people but they remain blind and don't seem to *want* to have their sight restored. The scribes and Pharisees don't want to *learn* anything from Jesus; they just want to get him in trouble. The rich young man who we met a few weeks ago, who came to Jesus so sincere about wanting to gain eternal life, in the end he turned down the offer to follow Jesus and thus remained spiritually blind. The disciples never "get it;" three times Jesus explains to them that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, die on a cross, and on the third day rise from the dead. The first time he tells them, Peter rebukes him; the second time the disciples start arguing about which one of them is the greatest. The third time James and John ask to sit at Jesus right and left, like the silver and bronze medalists in the Olympic Games. Their minds are on the crown rather than the cross.
5. And Mark cleverly juxtaposes Bartimaeus with both the disciples and the rich young man to show that Bartimaeus had spiritual insight that the disciples and the rich young man lacked. The first thing Bartimaeus does when Jesus calls him over to him is he *throws off his cloak*. Earlier in this chapter of Mark a rich man had asked Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life, and Jesus had told him to leave everything behind and follow him. That man was not able to do it. Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, which was most likely *everything he had* besides the clothes on his back. It may not seem like much, but that cloak was the only thing Bartimaeus had to keep him warm on cold nights. In tossing off that cloak Bartimaeus shows that he is putting his full trust in Jesus. And what does Bartimaeus do when Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What would you have me do for you?" It's funny that Jesus asks the disciples James and John the very same question when they come up to Jesus and ask him for something; "What would you have me do for you?" They ask Jesus to give them positions of power; Bartimaeus, on the other hand, says, "Teacher, let me see again." Note that Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as, "*Teacher*..." One doesn't go to a teacher to be *physically* healed; you go to a doctor for that. But if you want *spiritual insight* you go to a *teacher*.

6. Finally, we know that Bartimaeus really wants to follow Jesus because once he is *physically* healed, *he follows Jesus on the way*. There are a lot of folks who look to Jesus to take care of some immediate need, and once that need is taken care of those folks forget all about Jesus. I'm reminded of the man who was arrested for drunk and disorderly conduct and had to appear in court in Manhattan. He has to be in court at 9:30 and he's driving around at 9:25 looking for a parking place and praying, "Lord Jesus, please find me a parking place. If you do that, I swear I'll quit drinking, I'll be a good husband, I'll go to church every Sunday, I'll...never mind; I found a spot!" If Bartimaeus was only interested in gaining sight, he would have gone when Jesus said, "Go." But because he wanted *insight*, he wanted the kind of sight that really matters, *spiritual* sight, he got on the road and followed Jesus, whose next stop would be Jerusalem where he would be tried, mocked, tortured and killed, and then rise on the third day. The Bible does not tell us if Bartimaeus stayed faithful to Jesus during those last days, but I believe that the two of them shared a lot of joy on the road to Jerusalem.

7. My friends, we struggle as the rich young man did, wishing to gain eternal life but unwilling to loosen our grip on the temporal things that hardly matter. We struggle as the disciples did, wishing to attain some portion of Christ's glory without sharing in his suffering and death; we are just as apt to abandon Jesus out of fear for our own lives as they were. Let us be like Bartimaeus, willing to throw off our cloaks, to put everything behind us for the opportunity to walk with the One who lives eternal. Let us be like Bartimaeus, seeking what really matters, not personal glory but a relationship with the one who walks the road marked with suffering but walks it with us, and lead us through it to live eternal. Let us pray.

Eternal God, we thank you for your Son Jesus who shows us the way to abundant life, to eternal live, a life that is not about *things* and not about *status*, but about a relationship with you that never ends. Your son Jesus shows us the way. Help us to be like Bartimaeus, bold and persistent in asking you for the spiritual healing that we are in such need of, and willing to give up everything to follow you, even when the path is rough and dangerous, because we would rather walk a dangerous path *with* you than a comfortable path without you. Amen.