

Beloved Teacher, Let Me See Again

Mark 10:46-52 by Patty Friesen (Oct. 28/18)

The setting for today's healing story is Jericho, which 7 miles from Jerusalem and is the last stop en route for pilgrims going to the city of David, Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples are on their way up to Jerusalem where the final week of Jesus' life takes place. On the way, they met the rich young ruler in verses 17-31 who cannot follow the hard call of Jesus. Today, on the way, they meet Bartimaeus. In both cases on his way Jesus is approached by someone who seeks to understand more deeply his way. In both cases Jesus is recognized, by these persons as worthy of respect as they sort themselves out on the way. They truly are seeking, the text suggests. They both call him Good or Beloved Teacher. And in both cases, Jesus looks upon them with compassion, the rich and the poor and invites them to follow him.

Twice in the prologue of Mark's gospel we hear of a "way of the Lord" which is prepared. As a verbal thread, the 'way' occurs eight times in the last half of the gospel with all manner of geographic movement throughout the earlier chapters. "The journey is the way of God. Being 'on the way' means more than moving through a physical landscape to Jerusalem; it also means that Jesus moves towards the goal God has set for him...For the disciples, this journey is a movement toward an understanding and an acceptance of what Jesus' 'way' is".¹ The road out of Jericho represents the final leg of the pilgrim's journey would have been the standard beat for much of that city's beggar population. The odds were good that pilgrims would have the mood and the means to give alms to blind beggars.

¹ David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 64-65.

Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus is respectfully named by his first name and his father's name before he is even identified as being blind and begging for a living. Bartimaeus is named and in turn names Jesus of Nazareth, son of David, calling on the royal line of kings, the hope of the Jewish people. Verse 49 says Jesus stood still - literally stopped in his tracks. For all the people who Jesus healed, there are a few that stand out as stopping Jesus in his tracks - one being the hemorrhaging woman who touched Jesus' cloak and now Bartimaeus. The crowd tried to block her from Jesus and now the crowd tries to shut Bartimaeus up but he cries out even more loudly.

"Call him here," Jesus said. And the crowd called the blind man saying, "Take heart, get up, he is calling you." It is a three-stage encouragement to 1- take heart in the midst of your despair, 2- get up, and 3- do something about it for Jesus is calling you near. So throwing off his cloak of begging and despair, Bartimaeus sprang up, which is a very enthusiastic way of getting up and followed Jesus' voice literally, to find him.

Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" These are the exact same words Jesus had asked James and John in the previous verses when their mother brought them to Jesus and they wanted to sit at the left and right hands of Jesus with status and privilege. But when asked, Bartimaeus only asks for his vision. Bartimaeus says, Good Teacher or Rabbouni, the same intimate words the beloved disciple Mary Magdalene called Jesus at his resurrection. "Good Teacher, let me see again." The again suggests that Bartimaeus did see at one time and experienced the life changing loss of sight that plummeted him from his previous life and ability to make a living and social standing to begging outside the gates of Jericho.

Bartimaeus provides a social contrast with the rich young ruler. The rich man could not liquidate his fortune, but poor Bartimaeus throws away his garment, his sole element of livelihood (beggars spread out their cloaks to receive alms.). The ruler at the top of the social scale rejected a direct call but the beggar on the bottom of the social ladder does not even wait for a call, but springs up and follows Jesus. The first have become last and the last first. This last healing/discipleship story makes clear that only if the disciples and modern day readers struggle against the internal demons that lead us from discipleship, and only if we renounce our thirst for power, in a word, only if we recognize our blindness and seek true vision - then can the discipleship adventure carry on.

Matthew's gospel says, "Moved with compassion, Jesus touched his eyes." Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way. Bartimaeus could see physically and now has spiritual insight to follow Jesus and continue to be taught by his beloved teacher. We may not receive sight again – we may not receive the healing that takes us back to the way things were before we got sick or experienced death. But we are called to throw off the cloak that identifies us only by our illness and get up and follow the Teacher wherever our path together may take us together. This kind of courage and trust to move forward may be the most powerful kind of healing we can receive. It is a trust that doesn't determine exactly what healing looks like but requires us to trust the One Who Heals, each step of the way.

We offer the spiritual practices of song and prayer and anointing for all who desire healing for themselves and as supporters of sick loved ones. We are particularly mindful of those seeking healing for breast cancer through surgery and chemotherapy

and all who have been affected by cancer. We bring all our hearts desires for healing this morning. For those who wish to come forward - George and I will offer anointing with oil in the palm of our hands to remind us of the God who created us and holds us all in the palm of his hand. For those

Let us pray...O God, we come to you at this moment because you love us. You know us more deeply than we know ourselves. You desire healing and wholeness for each of us, in our needs in body, mind and spirit. We come before you, praying for healing in each of our lives. Amen.