

Seeing Discipleship

22nd Sun. after Pent. – 10/24/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Mark 10:46-52 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 47, [The blind beggar, Bartimaeus, cried out, **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

v. 52 [Jesus said to him,] **“Go your way; your faith has made you well”** .

Introduction

✘ Clearly this account of Jesus miraculously healing a blind beggar is significant. But it's made even more significant when we realize that this is now the second person whom the Gospel writer, Mark tells us about in just three chapters that has been healed from blindness.

→ Whenever something is repeated in Scripture, you can bet our Lord wants us to perk up our ears and pay close attention. In this case we “see” that these two miracles serve as a pair of bookends, intended to hold together and draw the eyes of our faith and the ears of our hearts and minds upon the very important events and teachings that fall in between.

✘ As Jesus progresses ever closer to the cross with His disciples, He is confronted by the Jewish leaders and surrounded by the secular world with its Roman leaders and earthly kings.

→ As we heard last Sunday He is the “Good Teacher” (10:17). So Jesus knows that His disciples are constantly being bombarded and surrounded by worldly influences around them, so that they are still lacking in their understanding of who He truly is and what it means to be one of His followers.

→ So Jesus uses the healing of these two blind men to narrow their focus; to open their eyes, you might say, to the deeper truth of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

✘ You and I, as Christians, are disciples of Jesus as well, are we not? And we too are bombarded with worldly influences and tempted by those around us who have very warped, even blatantly false beliefs about who Jesus is and what it means to be one of His followers.

→ Therefore Jesus teaches us here today about Himself and especially the fact that a true disciple of Jesus is not necessarily the one who publicly makes a show of claiming him/herself to be a follower of Jesus. Instead the true disciple of Jesus is one who begins as the blind beggar, that then by Jesus' mercy, has his eyes opened wide to “see” Him and follow in His way.

I. The true disciple - always first a blind beggar.

✘ Now, the idea that you and I first had our spiritual beginning as one who was blind should not be any real surprise. “Blindness” is one of Scripture's most common metaphors for our world and our lives as people in this sin-fallen existence.

→ I think we've all experienced times when we find ourselves frantically searching for an item of great importance, but we just can't see it. It's not on the kitchen table or in your pockets or purse, or in the car or any of the other reasonable places it should be. You can't do anything until you find it, but try and try it just isn't there.

- Then someone else comes home and you share your struggle. “It's nowhere. I just can't see it,” you say. But then with one quick glance the other person sees it, picks it up and asks, “Is this what you're looking for?”

- There it was all the time, right under your nose. But something kept you blind to it.

✘ The truth about God's existence, as Paul says in Romans 1:19-20 is in plain sight for everyone in this world to see. “For what can be known about God is plain to them,” Paul says, “because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine

nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

→ Yet in sin all people are born blind to the truth; blind especially to the truth about Jesus and His primary purpose and work. Yet Isaiah 35:5 promised that Jesus, in His coming as the Messiah would change all of that. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened”, he said.

✘ This promise certainly pointed to Jesus’ power to physically open the eyes and heal the sight of those who could not see. But now, when Mark pairs these two miracles together in his Gospel, he directs us to blindness as a spiritual metaphor; as a deeper meaning.

→ In chapter eight, those disciples following Jesus demonstrated an amazing lack of understanding when Jesus fed first a crowd of five thousand and then one of four thousand people. He asked them in chapter 8:18, “Although you have eyes, do you not see?”

✘ How often might Jesus ask the same thing of you and me? Look for example at the countless times that you or someone you know has been ill, maybe even on death’s door, and yet Jesus has healed them miraculously. Or a time when you fell away from the Lord – stopped attending worship or even thinking about Him on a regular basis, but then something happened and He brought you back to a closer and more satisfying understanding of His love and care and saving work in your life. But then you became ill and you questioned where God was at or if He could help you at all, or you began to doubt Him again because your friends seemed to do just fine without Him.

→ The evidence is right there in front of you, as plain as the nose on your face. “Although you have eyes, do you not see” God’s mercy and love? “Although you have eyes, do you not see” how important Jesus is and His call for you to follow and connect to Him in His Word and Sacrament gifts for life and forgiveness and comfort and strength?

✘ My dear friends in Christ, not only Bartimaeus; but also Jesus’ disciples and we in the depth and persistence of our sin, can only beg for His mercy.

→ Bartimaeus, although his physical eyes could not see, recognized clearly that he was a poor miserable sinner before Jesus as the perfect Son of God. Jesus’ disciples told him to be silent, thinking that he was beneath them and an unimportant nuisance to Jesus. In their sin, they showed that although they could see, they were far more blind to the truth about Jesus, even though He was right there before their eyes.

→ Do we realize that we were also blind beggars? Do we consider ourselves better than that person begging on the corner, or that politician with whom we are at odds? Do we see how empty our hearts really are in the judgments that we make about others or the corrupt desires that rule our thoughts or because of the things that keep us away from Jesus and His gifts?

✘ So it is that the blind beggar, in his person and in his request, is the perfect expression of our status and standing before God.

II. Jesus’ mercy restores sight.

✘ And we see in our Gospel Reading today that Jesus, as the Messiah, knows all of these things about us, just as He did about Bartimaeus and His disciples that day.

→ That is why He delights to extend God’s mercy. He was not about to allow His hapless, arrogant and ignorant disciples to get away with keeping Him and His compassion for Bartimaeus at bay. “Call him”, Jesus demanded (v. 49).

✘ Mercy, which is God’s compassion and concern for sinful souls, is at the core of His very being. In Psalm 86:15-16 we hear David’s confession and cry, “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful

and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant”.

→ “Kyrie Elaison” is Greek for “Lord, have mercy” and it has been the humble cry of Christians as we gather for worship ever since Jesus’ interaction with Bartimaeus was recorded in the pages of Scripture. As we sing or speak this cry to the Lord for mercy in the various parts of our worship liturgy, it leads us in faithfully expressing our humility before God; in crying out to Him for His mercy (His compassion & help) in all of our needs and troubles.

→ Think of it this way, this humble cry is one of the most basic ways that Christians have connected with believers throughout the centuries, thereby guiding us in our worship with a proper frame of heart, mind and soul.

- ✘ On the surface we hear Jesus call Bartimaeus and immediately his sight is restored. Yet as miraculous as that was, the text suggests that the far greater miracle taking place that day concerned a matter of spiritual sight.

→ Three times in between Jesus restoring sight to the two men, Jesus predicts His Passion, death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34). Only a few verses before our text Jesus tells His disciples, “See...”. I don’t believe that first word is only a coincidence folks! “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise” (Mk. 10:33-34).

- ✘ This is what it means to truly have our eyes opened up from the blindness of sin and death; to see the coming of God’s kingdom in the light of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

→ This is the sight Jesus wants you and me and all people to have and enjoy. It’s what Bartimaeus saw when Jesus said, “Your faith has healed you” (v 52). Yes, his physical eyesight had been instantly restored. But far greater than that, he had now been saved for eternity!

→ This is why it is so important that you and I; that believers throughout the ages right up to our current day have a clear confession of Jesus as the Christ; that we see Him not only as an example of right living; not only as a figure for social justice or the validation for whatever my own personal agenda and lifestyle might be. No, Jesus is, as Bartimaeus rightly confessed, the promised “Son of David” and the Savior of sin-laden souls.

III. The true disciple follows in Jesus’ way.

- ✘ Once Bartimaeus received Jesus’ gift of saving “sight”, it’s significant that we’re told in verse 52 that he “followed [Jesus] on the way”.

→ Remember Bartimaeus was a blind beggar. He had nothing of earthly substance to offer Jesus and His band of followers. His bag was completely empty. I suspect he didn’t even have bag. All he could do was receive and follow!

- ✘ That’s what it means to be a Christian disciple. In Mark 8:34, right after He healed the first blind man, Jesus said, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me”.

→ That’s what Bartimaeus did. He followed Jesus on the way that led to Jerusalem and Jesus’ death. Forgiven and strengthened by Jesus’ saving work, His disciples were then able to endure persecution of all kinds in this life, because they knew Jesus’ death and resurrection is the only way to eternal life.

⌘ As modern day disciples, you and I follow Jesus too. As beggars, we are fully dependent upon His mercy as “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6). And now, while we follow Jesus, we too may suffer things like people shaming us because we believe in Creation instead of the lie of Evolution, or because we truly love those of all races and try to treat everyone around us with respect, or because we speak out to defend the lives of the unborn or disabled, and are willing to miss things like work and other Sunday morning activities for the joy of worshiping our Lord and growing in our faith.

➔ Above all else though, we follow Jesus in faith, kneeling at the foot of His cross in repentance, because we know that it leads us on the way to the victory and joy of His resurrection; to the promise of eternity under His gracious, eternal reign and rule.

Conclusion

⌘ May Jesus open the eyes of our hearts and minds today, to see Him as He truly is; as the Savior of us beggars and the only One whom we desire to follow today and forevermore. Amen.