

Right Sight Up

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[0 : 00] It's always important to make that decision to turn on the microphone. You'll be happy to know I've made a couple of, well, maybe better decisions this week. And one was I thought about asking you when you were going to share with one another your baptism date to actually close your eyes while you were doing that so that you might have some kind of feel what it might have been like for blind Bartimaeus in the passage that was read today.

Imagine how difficult that might have been, not only coming up with the date that you were baptized, but sharing it with someone else while your eyes were closed. I made another decision this week not to do something in preparation for this just to get a feel for what it might have been like for blind Bartimaeus.

And I thought maybe I would go out and actually beg for something. And now it was a fruitful exercise. Even now if you think about if you were to go out and beg for something, what would you beg for?

How would you do it? What clothes might you actually put on when you went out to do that? And what was actually going on as you were encountering people when you were begging?

I know that when we hear the story about blind Bartimaeus, we actually hear those words, blind Bartimaeus. But he was a beggar as well. And this story today, verses 46 through 52, is a continuation of those verses 32 and 45 when Jesus tells of his suffering, his death and resurrection for the third and final time.

[1 : 31] He takes the sons of thunder afterwards and their request to sit at his right and at his left when he comes into his kingdom. He teaches them then about the priority of greatness and the upside-down priority that it is to serve.

He indirectly identifies himself, that is, Jesus as the Son of Man then, who comes to serve, not to be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many. You see that the whole momentum of this story is upward.

Beginning with verse 32, we learn that Jesus, his disciples, and a crowd were on the road going up to Jerusalem. And Jesus says, let us go up to Jerusalem, a verse afterwards.

It ends with verse 52, where blind Bartimaeus, we are described as told, we're described, followed him on the way. Where? Up to Jerusalem.

And so the story begins and ends with all these people on the road or on the way. Today's story catches Jesus, his disciples, and a crowd on the way through Jericho.

[2 : 38] Jericho is a different city now than it was before when it was reduced to rubble, when all those walls came tumbling down. It's a city that Jesus didn't ignore.

He passed through it on the way up to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. What happened was he crossed over the Jordan River and proceeded southward with this group of people that were following him, and then he comes into Jericho.

And after Jericho, he's going to head over to the Mediterranean Sea. He's headed westward as he goes up, as he actually ascends 3,300 feet into that great city of David.

Well, not only are the people literally headed up, but they know that something is up. It's an emotionally volatile and charged situation. In verse 32, we're told that some are amazed and others are afraid.

In verse 41, we're told that the ten disciples are angry, to say the least. In today's story, we come across a man who's absolutely agitated.

[3 : 48] You've heard the phrase, keep calm and carry on. Well, the people are carrying on, but they're not exactly calm. In this story, we see blind Bartimaeus put faith in Jesus.

Jesus tells him his faith has healed him, has made him whole, has saved him. And we see what it means to have faith when it seems circumstances work against it. The story has elements of fact, faith, feelings.

The story shows us that faith isn't something we work up within ourselves. And faith is a gift revealed to us by God through Jesus Christ. It is a knowledge of Jesus that comes through seeing Jesus with the heart, not just with our eyes.

And when we see Jesus with what we know from the heart through truth revealed to us about Jesus, then we remain with him who died, rose again, ascended into heaven, and rules from the right hand of God.

This story is a reminder of the place, I think, of fact and feeling, yes, in faith, but where faith comes from, how it comes to us. And so let's look at this story about the healing of blind Bartimaeus.

[5 : 03] And it's easy to tame Bartimaeus with those words, but I want us to think about him, this blind man, yes, who is healed, as a beggar. He's desperate. He's dependent.

More than we can ever imagine for what it was like for someone who's blind 2,000 years ago. And so it's probably better to think of him as beggar Bartimaeus. His begging was just a symptom of his blindness.

And so look at beggar Bartimaeus. Beggar is acutely aware of his condition. He's not in the mainstream, as it were. He's not even on the road like the others.

He isn't walking along with his dark glasses on, isn't shuffling his feet with his white cane, the red extension, and the little ball on the end. He isn't just standing there.

He's off to the side. He's out of the way. He's sitting on the ground. He's plopped down by the roadside. He's helpless. He's hopeless.

[6 : 03] He hears something about Jesus of Nazareth and he cries out, Son of David. He bellows it. Son of David. He begs it. Son of David.

He cries out again and again and he's told to, I know what your text says, but he's told to shut up. Right? He's the first and only one to identify Jesus with these words, with this title.

How did he know? How did he come up with it? He didn't come up with it himself. It wasn't his idea. He did what Peter, James, and John didn't do.

Remember the mouth of transfiguration when the voice from heaven repeated those same words from Jesus' baptism, this is my beloved son. And the following words at the transfiguration, though, not included in his baptism, were, listen to him.

Well, apparently, the beggar was listening. Somewhere or sometime, he heard these words, Son of David. He heard what the Son of David would do and say.

[7 : 08] He listened and identified the works and words of Jesus with the Son of David. The Son of David was a messianic title. He was a ruler like David.

It's surprising, though Jesus hadn't even fought a single battle, right? Hadn't waged any war like David. And he never will in those same terms. But nevertheless, the crowd wants Jesus to restore the kingdom of Israel.

And he's on his way to the city of David. However, begging Bartimaeus didn't only cry out, Son of David, if you didn't notice.

He cried out, Have mercy on me. Mercy me. Mercy me. Mercy me, he kept saying. It's not just a cry, but a command.

It's a Psalm 130 cry. Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. And so it isn't just a shout. Just a proclamation.

[8 : 08] It isn't from the throat. It's from the gut. The bottom of the pit. It's a petition. It may not come as a surprise that he cries out then, Have mercy on me.

It's not too hard to imagine how he must have felt about himself. Think about that. However, this isn't about feeling only. He doesn't just feel badly about himself.

He needs mercy. He, like the psalmist from 130, knows this. If thou, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord. My soul waits. And in his word, I hope.

Begging Bartimaeus knows his greatest need is for mercy. Deep down, it's all that really matters. Ever since he heard about Jesus, he's been wondering, hasn't he?

[9 : 11] All this time, he's waited for the Messiah to come along and maybe hear this confession, as it were, of his. He doesn't even have to confess his specific sins.

He just cries for mercy. And he commands the forgiveness of the Lord. He has no fear of the crowd. He has only the fear of the Lord.

And this is probably the only chance he'll ever have to say something to the only person who can do anything about his relationship with God. Some of us here today know what this is like.

We've cried for mercy. We've cried out loud. We've cried in silence. In the throes of some circumstances, maybe our illness or someone else's, a broken relationship, a lost job, the death of a loved one.

Mercy me. Mercy me. And these things happen maybe for no fault of our own or maybe for our own fault. But we know deep within our sin that comes to the surface at times like this that God alone can forgive only our specific sins and address our sinful condition.

[10 : 25] Some of us know all too well what it's like for begging Bartimaeus. We aren't blind, but our conditions both outwardly in the body and inwardly from the soul keep us from seeing straight.

It's like we're spiritually impaired and just stuck sitting there waiting for Jesus to walk by. And around us are all these people. Some are well-meaning.

Others are spiritually impaired themselves. We sit and know we can't stand before God because not just our physical condition but especially our spiritual condition is in desperate need of the Lord's mercy.

And so there sits blind Bartimaeus, begging Bartimaeus. The crowd on the other hand is on its way up. They've got better things to do. They know something's up.

They're caught up in the moment. And there's this great momentum at this time for the Passover feast. And they won't be deterred. They won't let someone interrupt the buzz.

[11 : 25] And so they shush him. They tell him to shut up. Worse, they rebuke him like he's some kind of demon possessing them. And you can hear them do it.

You can even see them doing it, can't you? It comes first with a glance and then a glare and then just some kind of gesture. And it all goes along with these words, shut up.

It wasn't just that Bartimaeus was crying. It wasn't just that he was calling out of the depths. It was that he was calling out for mercy. Think about it.

If it would have just been son of David, they would have said, yes, amen, son of David, son of David. They might have just said, have mercy on me, have mercy on me, have mercy on me. They might have just kind of dismissed him on that.

But this son of David, have mercy on me. It was embarrassing. They probably thought this man had no dignity. After all, he wasn't just blind.

[12 : 23] He was a beggar. He wasn't one of them. He wasn't on the road. He wasn't on the way. He was just sidelined. He was supposed to just sit there with his sign.

He was supposed to just sit there with his ball cap. He was supposed to sit there and shut up. Shut up carries all these messages, doesn't it? He wasn't supposed to draw any attention to himself.

But the fact of the matter is that he wasn't drawing attention to himself. He was drawing attention to Jesus. Who is Jesus? The son of David, the Messiah.

What does he do? He forgives sins. It must have been convicting. The first time might have been okay. The second, third, fourth, and additional times was just a little too much.

After a little while, it's cutting right to the heart of the matter. Maybe there's a little something to what this man was saying. It doesn't take long after you've been around Jesus to realize who you are, that you're a sinner, and that there's something unique about this person.

[13 : 30] He's not just a good example. He's not just a good kind of teacher. Rabbi, yes, he is. Son of David, definitely. Lord of mercy, absolutely. And the admission of this man's guilt leads to an amendment of life, and this was time for repentance.

The people didn't need to hear about repentance at this time, did they? Because it was a great time of anticipation, and this was the event to celebrate. And finally, a leader who would restore a kingdom, the kingdom of Israel.

Yes, Jesus was like David. That was right. But they wanted to just add a little cry of, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

But this man adds, have mercy on me. This beggar's cry was repentance and action. Faith cries out, have mercy on me.

And this is faith. Knowing that we sin, and Jesus can have mercy on our sins, goes beyond the notion that it's just nice to have a little bit of faith.

[14 : 34] That's not faith. Therefore, a little faith is all right, we might say in our culture, but just not too much of it. Just enough to get me through this life, right? Faith is one of those resources that makes life just a little bit better.

You know, maybe it makes a relationship with a spouse better, or being a parent better, or an employee, or whatever else, even a friend. Throw it all in, but it just makes life a little bit better. But as these things suggest, faith is just one of the essential ingredients of the pie that makes it taste so good.

Faith isn't the essential ingredient of life that makes it sweet. Jesus suffers. Jesus dies, rises again. Faith is the substance of the gospel that grips us by grace, causing us to cry out, not just Hosanna, son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, but have mercy on me.

No matter what anyone around us thinks, we cry out, as this man did, in faith, have mercy on me. We cry, have mercy on me, because we know our condition, and we know that we deserve even worse than what it is.

And so when Jesus hears this, he stops. You notice that? It's very compelling, very interesting.

[15 : 53] One of my children's favorite scripture memory verse is the shortest one in the Bible, and Jesus wept. I decided this one is my favorite one for the week. He stopped.

I could just stop for a week and sit with Jesus. Right? He hasn't heard anyone use the son of David in the rest of the gospel of Mark before.

Someone's been paying attention. He hasn't heard anyone put together, son of David, have mercy upon me. And the crowd is so big that Jesus can't even get to the man. And he doesn't even know how to find the man.

And he tells the people, call the man. And so they called him. They say to him, you know, after telling him to shut up, and then they tell him to cheer up, then get up. And finally the man springs up and they say to him, he is calling you.

I thought Jesus already called him, but apparently he is still calling him through these men. It's fascinating. One minute they're rebuking him, the next minute they're actually calling him.

[17 : 01] And he throws off his cloak, runs to Jesus. He's calling me. He's calling me. He's calling you. He's calling you. That's what they're telling him. Must ring in his ear. And how did he know where to go?

How fast did he run? How did he know where to stop? I can see the people now holding him in case he slipped and fell, right? I can see them finally restricting him so that he didn't slam into Jesus.

They wouldn't dare touch this man before. I'm sure he didn't smell very well. But now they have to guide him to Jesus because Jesus is calling him.

And when the beggar arrives, Jesus asks him, what do you want? That's not all, is it? He goes on, what do you want me to do for you?

Jesus once asked two of his disciples who were following him, what do you want? And immediately before this scene that we read today, he says to his two other disciples, when they say, will you do for us whatever you ask?

[18 : 04] To them too, he says, what do you want me to do for you? Jesus knows how to say yes and no. The last time, in a matter of words, to the two disciples, he said yes and no.

This time, it's just a yes. And the beggar knows all too well that Jesus can do for him what he cannot do for himself. Bartimaeus knows he can't mercy himself.

He also knows he can't restore his own sight. And it's Jesus. If Jesus can mercy him, have mercy on him, then he can heal him. It's like Bartimaeus already knows he's received mercy, which is the greatest miracle.

He doesn't actually ask him for mercy after having cried out for it. But Jesus now confirms what took place inwardly with something outwardly. Bartimaeus doesn't hesitate to make this second petition.

Let me recover my sight, he says. And his vision is restored. He knew Jesus from his heart. Now he sees Jesus with his eyes.

[19 : 13] Helen Keller once was asked this question, get this, isn't it terrible to be blind? Not very pastoral. She replied, it's better to be blind with both eyes and see with your heart than to have both eyes and see nothing.

This miracle is an outward sign of an inward reality. Jesus opened the eyes of this man's heart. The man couldn't do that for himself. And now Jesus opens the eyes in his head that were once blind.

And the man couldn't do that for himself either. And there is something sacramental about all miracles in the same way that the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are outward signs of inward realities.

Namely, as we heard today, baptism is the outward sign pointing to the death and resurrection of Jesus that washes away our sins. Holy Communion is the outward sign that points to the death and resurrection of Jesus that nourishes our lives so that we can have communion with him.

But here, this miracle, this outward sign is that of an inward reality. And miracles point to something beyond themselves that correspond with what work God is spiritually doing.

[20 : 33] in our life. Miracles are not ends in themselves. No. But they point to the work of Jesus and what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will continue to do in our lives.

But miracles, like this healing, unlike baptism and Holy Communion, can't be instituted. And that doesn't make them better or worse, just different.

but both confirm and compel our faith in Jesus. And so this faith that Jesus shows and gives to the man outwardly as well as inwardly also has its aspirations.

We're not healed outwardly and inwardly for no reason at all. And I want you to turn to page 143 with your book of common prayer with me just for a moment. Today's collect actually wasn't a sign with this reading but it expresses it beautifully.

Collect reads, Almighty God, look at this, who cease that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves, keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls that we may be defended from all adversities which happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt our souls through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[22 : 05] Amazing, isn't it? This is our prayer in light of today's reading. It's not about what we see if you notice in the colic, it's actually about what God sees.

He ultimately sees that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves and the petition is that God keeps, preserves, saves both our bodies and our souls.

In other words, our whole lives. He's the one who keeps us. He's the one who saves us. Right? And the reason is that we know that He's our defense against the things that assault our bodies but also the evil thoughts within our lives that we would be protected from those.

Just think of the evil thoughts that might have come upon this man from outside but even from inside of him what he might have believed about himself because he was blind and because he was a beggar. Right?

The evil thoughts that assault the soul. So though, we have a choice then to follow Jesus and faith is for following Him in our words but also with works.

[23 : 12] Now, while miracles are not the end, there is an end to them and the end is as Jesus tells Bartimaeus, go your way.

Go your way, He says to him. Faith is for following Jesus and when Jesus says, go your way, He isn't just saying something like, well, have it your way. Right?

He's saying, you choose. Saying, again, what do you want? Get on the road. And in the beginning in the middle end of this section, the road is laid out before Jesus and He goes on that road and the disciples follow Him on that road and Jesus doesn't make anyone get on the road to follow Him but it is before Him and He is before us and He invites us onto that road.

And so Mark tells us in verse 52 that Jesus said to Bartimaeus, your faith has made you well. It has healed you. It has saved you. And that He immediately recovered His sight and He followed Jesus on the way.

Most of us have decided to follow Jesus. Some of us haven't. But Jesus calls us this morning to follow Him without turning back or getting distracted or pulled in different directions or even in different questions maybe.

[24 : 34] And I wonder what the ascent up to Jerusalem was like for this man Bartimaeus as he walked with Jesus and maybe the others who called Him to Jesus.

What it must have been like to walk up that way. That 3,300 feet from Jericho to Jerusalem then now to see Jesus suffer and die and then rise again.

let me just leave you with one implication. The whole kind of momentum and movement of this story is upward.

We're in the season of Lent and started a couple of weeks ago and we're moving upward not just onward not just kind of forward as we too will be reminded of Jesus' death and His resurrection and later ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit but are we on that road?

Are we moving upward with the church as we celebrate Jesus' death and His life? Jesus continually calls us in that way sometimes through other people as He called this man through those who were actually around Him as well calling us calling us to Him and the great thing about that is that it says that He called him in the past tense but then it says that He was told the man was told that He is calling you and Jesus is always calling us He didn't just call us once and that was the end of it He keeps calling us again and again and again we've responded to His call and we continually have opportunities to respond to His call again and again and again as we follow Him as He goes before us let's pray Jesus not to minimize

[26 : 31] Bartimaeus' state of begging but we are all beggars before you blind not seeing as we ought who you are sometimes making you out to be somebody else but thank you for your continual calling us and we pray that we would hear your call and we would identify you in terms like Bartimaeus the son of David but not leaving out have mercy on us Jesus have mercy on us and let us spring up as Bartimaeus did and follow you in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit I pray Amen Amen