

Bartimaeus was not the first blind man Jesus healed, even in the gospel of Mark. Mark chapter 8, verse 22, in Bethsaida, Jesus was presented with a blind man brought on by the blind man's friends who asked Jesus to heal him. Usually, in the Bible, in the same gospel story, a story does not repeat itself, or a similar story is told twice unless there is something else the gospel writer wanted us to know.

This is the last story of Jesus healing or performing a miracle in the gospel of Mark. After this, Jesus and his disciples enter into the city of Jerusalem. And we are told that this story takes place in Jericho, the last major town before Jerusalem. Jesus had already begun preparing his followers for what would happen to him when they were in Jerusalem and how he would suffer, die, and rise again in three days. Of course, none of his followers seem to understand what Jesus is saying. All they can think about is how Jesus will take the city and how they will become the first twelve to be seated in the power and position of importance, as we talked about last week in Mark chapter 10, verses 35-45. So, Opening the Eyes of the Blind Bartimaeus speaks to the readers astounded by the blindness of the disciples and perhaps reminds them and us of the importance of having the eyes of faith to see.

What is unusual about this story is that it tells us the blind man's name is Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. Never in any other stories of Jesus meeting the blind man was the mentioning of the man's name. Many commentators say that this man was probably known as one of the disciples, a person of faith in the community where Mark wrote his gospel, and he was still celebrated for his faith in this community. Indeed, it is evident at the end of the story that Bartimaeus ends up following Jesus on the way.

But Bartimaeus' story is special not only because his name was known in the gospel but because of his great faith. Clearly, he knows and has faith in Jesus, the Son of David, which meant the savior, and from the moment he was told that Jesus was passing by, Bartimaeus called out to Jesus, "Son of David, Have mercy on me!" "Son of David, have mercy on me!" convinced that Jesus is the savior, he did not stop until he was finally heard and called up before Jesus. Mark tells us that he shouted so loud that those with Jesus on the road had to restrain him, or "many sternly ordered him to be quiet." But he persisted even with this; he would not let anyone stop him from getting Jesus' attention. So Bartimaeus shouted even louder. It is interesting how the others in the story try to stop Bartimaeus; they are not like the friends of the blind man in chapter 8; they are not friendly; some of them were with Jesus, who was about to enter Jerusalem, and they are serious and had no room for any interruption. But Jesus heard him and knew what was going on, and interestingly, he did not call Bartimaeus himself, but he asked the same people who scorn him to be quiet to bring the blind man to him. And when Bartimaeus is called up, the story is transformed, and the crowd and their attitudes are transformed too... to be supportive and encouraging, they become the messenger of the good news, "Take heart, get up; he is calling you."

Secondly, Bartimaeus' reaction is remarkable. Mark tells us that he throws away his cloak, jumps up from his seat, and comes to Jesus. The cloak he threw off could have been his only possession and maybe his everything; living on the street, we can only imagine how he must have lived. But in an instant, he gave all that up. Jumping for joy when he was called up, he sprang up, filled with excitement, enthusiasm, and delight; he must have been ecstatic to hear his Lord and Savior call him to come.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks as Bartimaeus comes standing before him. This question echoes the one Jesus previously asked his disciples, John and James. Bartimaeus answered, "My teacher, let me see again." You might say what a silly question to ask a blind man; of course, he will say I want to see again." But not necessarily; many ask for the wrong things, like James and John.

They call it being in tune with God, knowing what to ask, who they are asking from and seeing what is going on, which James and John failed to do.

We sometimes struggle with prayer, not knowing what to say or to ask. Some of us are vague in our prayers because we don't know what to ask for or how to ask it, and perhaps deep down, we are not sure if we will get it if we ask.

Not Bartimaeus; he knew exactly what to ask for; he asked, trusting that he would receive. Jesus heard and indeed granted him what he asked.

So, Bartimaeus's story helps, especially when we pray. First, like Bartimaeus, we must completely trust Jesus to save us. Second, we must call out to him persistently and loudly, as if our lives depended on it. Third, we must be in tune with God, understand who Jesus is and what he wants for us, and trust that he will hear our prayers because he knows us and loves us. Then, we should ask clearly and precisely, trusting that Jesus has the power to save.

Seeing his faith, Jesus praised Bartimaeus, saying, "Go, your faith has made you well." There are only a handful of places where this kind of high praise was given, firstly in the story of 10 lepers in Luke 17:11-19, where Jesus praised the five lepers who came back to him to thank and praise; Jesus said, "Go, your faith has made you well." And this appears again in the story of the woman haemorrhaging in Matthew 9:20-22. Likewise, seeing how deep her faith goes, Jesus said Go; your faith has made you well.

Through this encounter, Bartimaeus's life is completely changed and transformed. He is never the same after he receives what he has asked for after he can see again. His first-hand experience of Jesus' power and authority changed his life for good. He now had been given the eyes to see not only physically but also spiritually, seeing Jesus as the way to salvation, the pathway to life. And so, naturally, he decided to follow Jesus on the way.

This story is powerful and helped many of us in our faith journey. Many of us have found solace in Bartimaeus's story and his experience of darkness and living on the road begging, which can all be metaphors for our spiritual life. We know what it means to experience not seeing, to live through spiritual darkness, to feel lost, alone, stuck, confused, and unclear. Either in grief or loss or when we live through the shadow of the past, the guilt and regrets of our failures or disappointments. We know what it feels like to sit on the roadside begging like Bartimaeus, where we stand still when everybody else has moved ahead, feeling exhausted, unmotivated, despairing, and indifferent, feel depleted and have no reserves, when life overwhelms us, feeling like we cannot do anything but cry out to God for mercy.

Pete Grieg, a Scottish pastor, author, and founder of a prayer movement called 24/7 Prayer, talks about his earlier life as a pastor, thriving in his ministry and life. But, one day, out of the blue, he said his wife was rushed to the hospital with severe seizures, and after many tests, she was diagnosed with Brain Tumor. A tumor as big as a golf ball in her brain caused her to have constant seizures and so much pain. He said many offered prayers and came to console him and his wife, but as she suffered, he struggled silently. He said he could not take comfort in any; he lived a life of darkness, lived a shadow of guilt and regret, grieving; many a time, he struggled, exhausted, and felt like being abandoned; nothing mattered; it was just too overwhelming. But, he said, one night, in his sleep, he heard a voice that he thought was his wife's, or it could have been someone else's, whispering, "Pray!" "Pete, Pray!" He said, honestly, during this time, he felt he was abandoned by God, blinded by his grief, as if God was on mute (title of his book); later, he understood that perhaps he could not hear or see anything because he was grieving. The voice came to him, he said, a few more times after this. He was praying then; he was a pastor, but pouring his heart into prayer was not easy. And so, finally, he decided to put everything on hold and poured all his time and energy into prayer. It was a slower start initially, but he persisted for weeks and months. Finally, he cried... really, crying. After that, he said he knew what it meant to be in tune with God. Prayer did that, and his experience of darkness got him there... at first, nothing drastic seemed to be happening. Yet, slowly, he began to experience God in completely different ways. It was like God slowly unveiling his eyes to see, to see how God transformed his and other people's lives, even his wife's, through prayer; he no longer looked down, but he began to look upward and see the amazing things that God is doing in his lives and the God in Jesus indeed has the power to save.

We sing, "Nothing is lost in the breath of God. "It is true, not even our darkest time..."

So, how does this story speak to you today? If we were Bartimaeus, called upon by Jesus, how would we respond to Jesus who said, "What do you want me to do for you?" More importantly, how would Jesus find us?

Jesus said, "Go; your faith has made you well." He immediately regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

