

Gospel: Mark 10:46-52

Bartimaeus comes to Jesus with faith, asking that he might see again. Recognizing Jesus' identity, Bartimaeus is the first person to call him "Son of David" in the Gospel of Mark.

⁴⁶As [Jesus] 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.

When my wife and I were first married, now some twenty-seven years ago, and we moved into our first apartment, I came home one evening and she was looking at me in a sort of an expectant way. I could tell that she was expecting some sort of reaction from me. I didn't know what that reaction was supposed to be. It started to get a little uncomfortable because I could tell she was expecting me to react, but I just didn't know what I was supposed to react to.

Finally, she said, "So, what do you think?" That was what I was afraid of. I had absolutely no idea what she was referring to. She didn't look any different. I looked at her, I looked around the room, and I really didn't notice anything different. I finally had to say, "What do I think about what?"

I could see the disappointment in her face. She said, "about the boxes?"

Honestly, that wasn't really much help. She could see that in my face, so she said, "I unpacked the last boxes and put everything away and so now we are completely unpacked and moved in."

As obvious as it was, I hadn't noticed, even though she had unpacked the remaining 15 or so boxes that had been in the dining room where we were eating dinner. I hadn't seen something that was very clear.

I was, of course, reminded of that experience, despite it happening so long ago, by today's gospel involving Bartimaeus.

It's a great story. Bartimaeus, who is blind, and is forced to beg because of his disability, hears that Jesus is coming. He shouts out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus hears him, calls him, heals him. "Immediately, the man regains his sight and follows Jesus."

It's a great story, but there is so much more to it, if we notice the details.

Did you notice that when Bartimaeus shouts out to Jesus "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" the other people in the town aren't so happy about it? They seem to be embarrassed by Bartimaeus. The gospel tells us that "many sternly ordered him to be quiet." It's the people who are closest to Jesus who don't want him to be pestered by this bothersome guy who is creating a traffic jam in the road and making a bunch of noise. They certainly don't want to give up their spot near Jesus so that someone else can get near to him.

It's interesting that Bartimaeus calls Jesus "Son of David" because by doing so he reveals that he understands that Jesus is the Messiah. So far in St. Mark's gospel, those who are close to Jesus haven't really fully understood who he is. They've not understood that to be greatest is to be least. They've not understood the importance of little children. They've not seen that we need to serve. They've asked Jesus to let them sit on his left and his right. But Bartimaeus grasps that Jesus is the Messiah. They are telling him to be quiet and yet he's the one who actually understands.

Of course, they don't stop Bartimaeus. He just shouts more loudly. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

But then did you notice what Jesus did? Jesus stopped walking. He stood still. He looked at the crowd pressing in around him and he made room for one more. Jesus said to the crowd, "Call him here." Jesus didn't call Bartimaeus directly. Jesus calls the crowd to call him. These people who were trying to keep Bartimaeus away from Jesus have been changed. It's like they are transformed. They say to Bartimaeus, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." They went from excluding Bartimaeus to telling him to take heart and go forward into Jesus' embrace.

When Bartimaeus learns that Jesus is calling for him, he throws off his cloak and hurries toward Jesus. That's a pretty important detail. Your cloak kept you warm at night. It hid your head and face from bad weather and, if need be, from being recognized. A cloak could be used as sort of collateral for a loan. Your cloak's decoration signaled your social importance to other people. Ornamentation on your cloak could also show how religious you were.

Bartimaeus' cloak was so important that that if Jesus had not healed his eyesight, he would have lost his most important possession. If Jesus didn't heal Bartimaeus, Bartimaeus would have been ruined. When he jumped up and threw off his cloak, he was all in. He had faith that Jesus would heal him.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus a very simple, but remarkable question: "What do you want me to do for you?"

It's remarkable because Jesus had just had a similar encounter with James and John when they said they wanted to sit at his right and left in the kingdom of God.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?"

He answers, "My teacher, let me see."

Jesus doesn't have to touch Bartimaeus or spit on the ground to make mud. He just has to speak. He says, "Go; your faith has made you well." The gospel tells us that Bartimaeus immediately regains his sight and begins to follow Jesus. Bartimaeus doesn't go back or go away, he follows Jesus. He joins the others who are following Jesus to Jerusalem and to the cross. The disciples wanted to keep Bartimaeus from Jesus, but as always, Jesus opened his arms to all.

Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What you do want me to do for you?"

And Bartimaeus' words are our words, "My teacher, let me see."

We need to see how loved we are, how hungry for love others are, how worthy of love they are, how precious and wonderful our neighbors are. We need to see that this love comes from God, our creator, from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "My teacher, let me see."

Sometimes when we look at ourselves, when we look at our lives, we notice our failings. We notice the weight we could stand to lose or the wrinkles that have come with age or the job we wish we had or the student loan payment that is too high or the illness that we face or the uncertain future or the broken relationship and we don't see how loved we are...loved by family and friends most likely, but loved by God for sure. We don't see that we are so loved by God that God sent Jesus who died on a cross and then rose from death to new life conquering death and the grave forever and giving us the gift of eternal life. "My teacher, let us see."

Sometimes when we notice others, we notice differences. We notice what divides us, what separates us, what pulls us apart. We notice what we think their shortcomings are or how their views and beliefs diverge from our own. We overlook their needs. We overlook those who are hungry, those who lack adequate employment or medical care, sufficient housing, or acceptance, justice, and respect. We don't see how hungry for love others are, how worthy of love they are, how precious and wonderful our neighbors are. "My teacher, let me see."

My friends, Bartimaeus' words are our words. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

"My teacher, let me see."

Amen.