This Week’s Scripture Reading -

Mark 10:46-52

Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

The restoration of sight to this blind beggar at Jericho is the last healing story in the Gospel of Mark. This story is unique because throughout Mark, Jesus heals people but encourages them not to say anything. In Mark 1:43-44, Jesus tells the man who was healed from Leprosy not to tell anyone except for the high priest. In Mark 1:32-34, Jesus drives out demons but did not allow the demons to talk because “they knew who he was”. We see other occurrences of Jesus healing people who are plagued with demons (Mark 3, Mark 5). Each time Jesus tells them not to say anything. In this story, blind Bartimaeus is healed and then follows Jesus along the road. It is important to see the shift in the story. Bartimaeus is following Jesus for a reason. Something big is about to happen.
Let’s Dig into the Word –

- **Reflection Question –** On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples come to Jericho, where Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, shouts at them. What does Bartimaeus want from Jesus? *** Look closely ... it seems that there are two requests from Bartimaeus. Why doesn’t he just ask Jesus to heal him from the beginning? ***

- **Reflection Question –** This is a story that if we would let ourselves, could be one that can be looked at from different levels. Let’s not take things for face value. Allow your imagination to bring out thoughts that you might otherwise have overlooked ... Imagine yourself in the crowd that day in Jericho. It’s hot, dry and dusty. You’re excited; you’re with Jesus; you’re going up to Jerusalem. And here is someone shouting from the roadside. It’s a nuisance. It’s possibly even dangerous (if enough people call him “Son of David,” someone in authority is going to get alarmed). Think about a time when you felt like the disciples did at that moment. How did you feel? Mixed emotions? *** Teachers ... if at all possible, provide an example and allow the class to start sharing. ***

This passage marks the transition from Jesus healing and ministering to people (Mark 1-8), Jesus teaching through discipleship (Mark 8), to the point where Jesus predicts his death and confronts the religious authorities in Jerusalem (Mark 11-13).

- **Reflection Question –** What does Jesus mean by the question he asks Bartimaeus in return (vv. 49-52)? “

  “Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

  “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.”

Commentaries show that there was a reason for Jesus to respond with such an odd question “what do you want me to do for you?” A further element linking this paragraph to the preceding material is Jesus’ question (v51) echoing his identical words to James and John in 10:36. James and John are motivated to ask Jesus for very selfish reasons. They were looking for the perceived fame that would come from
sitting at the right and left hand of Jesus. The misguided request of the latter is here corrected by the enlightened desire of a blind man. “On the other hand, the story points ahead in that among “those who followed (and) cried out, ‘Hosanna!’” (11:9) is the healed beggar who becomes a follower (10:52). Bartimaeus’ twice-repeated cry for help to the Son of David (10:47, 48) is echoed by the acclamations of the crowd on entering Jerusalem.

➢ Reflection Question – How do Bartimaeus’ actions stand in contrast to the disciples’ in the last couple of chapters?

“When Jesus says “Your faith has saved you,” the word saved refers once again to physical healing. For any early Christian, though, it would carry a wider and deeper meaning as well. The different dimensions of salvation were not sharply distinguished either by Jesus or by the Gospel writers. God’s rescue of people from what we think of as physical ailments on the one hand and spiritual peril on the other were thought of as different aspects of the same event. But again not for the first time, we see that the key to salvation, of whatever kind, is faith. That’s why anyone, even those normally excluded from pure or polite society, can be saved. Faith is open to all; and often it’s the unexpected people who seem to have it most strongly. And faith consists not least in recognizing who Jesus is and trusting that he has the power to rescue.”

Digging into the commentary shows us a few similarities and a few differences between the disciples and the beggar, Bartimaeus …

Mark highlights quite a few “restoration of sight” incidents throughout the gospel. “Bartimaeus acquired the spiritual vision and became the ideal disciple. At the cross; however, he, with all the other disciples, will flee. Yet at this point in the story, Bartimaeus’ perception as an outsider stands in vivid contrast to the blindness of the disciples as insiders. Furthermore, “he received his sight” stands in close, parallel relationship to “followed him on the way.” The text is an invitation to come to Jesus and so to see; to see and so to follow Jesus”.

The curing of blindness is definitely a miracle story.

“It includes a
  o problem (blindness, vv 46-51)
  o a solution (Jesus’ word “Your faith has made you well,” v 52a)
  o evidence of a cure (receiving sight and following Jesus, v 52b)”

This shows a tangible relationship between one’s faith and healing. Without this extraordinary faith, healing may not be possible. Bartimaeus relies on his faith to get Jesus’ attention and then to believe that if Jesus would only have mercy on his soul, that he would regain his sight. Bartimaeus puts
everything he has on his faith in Jesus. No hidden agendas, no shame, no doubt. Just “blind” faith. This faith causes Bartimaeus to be bold, to cry out, to not allow the crowds or furthermore the disciples to quiet him down. He knows who Jesus is and he knows what Jesus can do for him.

To mimic Bartimaeus’ blind faith, Jesus performs a miracle without a word or without a touch. “Jesus’ word is presented simply as a dismissal of the man; the major emphasis is on the man and his faith. This story isn’t as much about the healing of a blind man but as a story that marks a “call” into ministry. “Here it is Bartimaeus who takes the initiative, both crying out first and by choosing, without any explicit invitation, to make Jesus’ way his way. Uniquely in this narrative the call is mutual: Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus and Jesus call Bartimaeus.”

Reflection Questions – Imagine yourself as the blind man. We all have something, by no means necessarily a physical ailment, that we know is getting in the way of our being the people we believe God wants us to be and made us to be. What is it you want Jesus to do for you?

Take Away –

Regardless of who a person is ... whether they are inside or outside of the church, “What do you want me to do for you?” underlines the importance of getting our deepest desires straight. James and John (10:35-37) did not; but Bartimaeus did (10:51). His responses, first to Jesus’ question and then to his command, show that he wanted the right thing; and he wanted it the right way. He did not secretly cherish his infirmity. He really wanted to be healed. “Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, unuttered or expressed.” Bartimaeus expressed his prayer persistently, plainly, and honestly, “and immediately he received his sight.”

Some Christians, moved perhaps by Mark’s exposure of the blindness of the disciples (their lack of faith that caused their motivations to be less than honorable), may begin to realize their own misunderstanding of Jesus and of discipleship, but accept their condition (literal or figurative blindness) as normal. The healing of Bartimaeus is testimony to the power of Jesus to restore (make well, save) those who know they are blind. The eager persistence of Bartimaeus is calling out and his actively springing up to come to Jesus when called serve as a model of faith.

The healing of blind Bartimaeus is not simply a vivid story with a moral for Christians; it is a witness to Jesus Christ and a call to follow him.

The question is ... “can you exhibit such faith in your present circumstances, to cry out to Jesus and follow Him, no matter what”? 