

## **“Lessons From a Blind Beggar”**

Liturgical Date: Proper 25 B

Primary Text: St. Mark 10:46-52

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, is the Gospel lesson from St. Mark Chapter 10. The title of the sermon is “Lessons From a Blind Beggar”.

At first glance, the miracle that we hear about today sounds fairly “routine”, if an incredible miracle can ever be described in that way! On His way out of Jericho, Jesus heals a blind man-St. Matthew tells he would actually heal two blind men there. Jesus heals blindness at other times and this of course has physical and spiritual implications as we heard in Jeremiah 31 that the Messiah would heal the “blind” and “lame”. Jesus had done many other powerful miracles that often overshadow this one. In this case we see this blind beggar call out to Jesus for help and Jesus heals him. As we often see in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is always on the go and along the way He shows His power and compassion as God, in healing this man. A great miracle, no doubt. But without understanding the context here and what Jesus wants us to learn from this blind man, we would miss a good bit of what God has for us in this text. Before we get to the specific lessons we can learn from this healed blind man, as the sermon title says, we must examine the context a bit.

Jericho is an important city in the Bible. The central part of the city shifted over time, but roughly it was located 6 miles west of the Jordan River and 18 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It is near the Dead Sea and its elevation is low, 825 feet below sea level. Of course, the city is known for the famous battle in the Old Testament which saw Joshua and the Israelites take the city after its walls

miraculously fell. But it is prominent in the New Testament too. In the Good Samaritan Parable, the man who will be beaten and robbed was travelling down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jesus calls down that short and repentant tax collector, Zaccheus, in this city as well. But none of this we learn from St. Mark's Gospel, in terms of Jericho this evangelist only writes about the healing of the blind beggar. While this healing is also recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke as well, Mark focuses in like a laser on this one particular man. Only Mark names him. And in fact, think about the healing miracles of Jesus and almost never is the name of the person healed given, but here he is specifically named: Bartimaeus. Why? Why would this one event be chosen for Mark to record? Why would there be such a large focus on this one guy?

Understand that we have reached a very important transition point in Mark. What happens right after this? Chapter 11 begins with the Triumphal Entry, the first Palm Sunday, as Holy Week begins. Everything else in the life and ministry of Jesus is being brought to a close with this miracle. Again, this points us to how important it is. Think about the Gospel readings we have heard over the last few Sundays, some of which I have preached on. In about the middle of chapter 8 (v22) we hear about Jesus healing another blind man, and this one took place in two stages. His vision was partially restored where he could see things in a blurry manner, but then completely restored by Jesus. Then we read about a whole bunch of stuff leading up to the end of Chapter 10: Peter's confession of faith, Jesus foretells His death and resurrection, the Transfiguration takes place, the demon possessed son is healed, Jesus speaks of His death and resurrection again, the disciples argue over who should be the greatest, the children are held up as examples and Jesus receives them, Jesus teaches about hell and divorce, the rich young ruler goes away disappointed, Jesus speaks of His death and resurrection a

third time, and finally James and John lobby for good positions-again. All of this is brought to a culmination in what we read today in verses 46-52 of Chapter 10.

I went through all of these events because we need to think of the themes that come up again and again. As far as we know, none of the 12 Disciples had any problems physically with their eyesight-but they definitely had problems with their spiritual sight. They were witnessing these great acts and incredible teachings from Jesus Himself. Yet often they did not get it, or at least did not fully understand-kind of like the blind man in Chapter 8 that was partially healed at first. Later (resurrection and Pentecost), the Disciples would “get it” and thus see fully as the healed man in chapter 8 after Jesus works the healing in its entirety.

But I would submit to you today, that of the adults that we read about in these chapters-the one who “gets it” the most was none other than this blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Jesus has been teaching about humility and servanthood (a key them in Mark). He has commended a child as the example of the greatness in the kingdom of God. He has said that children have faith. He has taken up the little children brought by their parents and blessed them and said that one must receive the kingdom of God as a little child. As I preached previously, this does not mean that only children can be saved-but it means just what it says “as a child”; meaning humility, willingness to serve, trusting, receiving, not trying to work to earn love. This is what we see with Bartimaeus. Contrast this blind beggar with the Disciples and some of the other adults we heard about in Chapters 8-10. If we do, we get quite the lesson from “Blind Bartimaeus”.

Our text opened with verse 46 with this man blind man Bartimaeus sitting by the highway, the main road out of Jericho. He is doing what chronically disabled people who did not have family to provide for them did at that time, and still do in many countries today. He was begging. This is the only way he could survive, off the kindness of people willing to throw a few coins his way. Think about what a

pathetic sight he must have been. Sitting there, empty eyes that could not see. Ragged clothes and even his skin likely wrinkled from the Middle Eastern sun. No doubt dirty as the people and animals traveling this unpaved highway kicked up dust and bits of manure. His voice calling out for alms if he thought someone was near him. Helpless, unable to work to earn a living for himself, of low status with no power in the community. Kind of like an adult version of a young child, if you think about it. But he was in just the right place and in just the right condition for his life to change that day.

Verse 47 says that when he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was coming by, he began to call out. What did this blind beggar say? What could he say? He had no great sums of money to offer Jesus. He could not even see to find Him on his own. He had not status, no resume of works and success. But he had something. He had something so many there that day, and so many in our day as well, lack. Faith. A humble and repentant faith. And that is all Bartimaeus needed. Verse 47, *“he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David have mercy on me.”* Notice that he does not simply address Jesus with a polite title. He addresses Him as the “son of David”. This means that he, this blind dirty beggar, is recognizing Jesus as not only a good teacher or miracle worker-but as the promised Messiah. He is addressing Him with a Messianic title as the Jewish people knew that the Messiah would be the “Son of David”. Jumping ahead to verse 51, he addresses Jesus as “Lord” which is here the Greek *“rabbouni”* and rarely used in the New Testament to address Jesus. It is a time of very high respect and honor. It is same Greek work that is used when Mary Magdalene realizes that it is the risen Jesus on the first Easter morning-pretty select company. John Calvin would write about this text, *“By the word faith is meant that not only a confident hope of recovering sight, but a loftier conviction, which was, that this blind man had acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah who God had promised.”*

And how do the people around Bartimaeus react to this calling out to the Messiah in humble faith? Much like the Disciples had acted earlier when the parents had been bringing those children to Jesus. How annoying! The people around want this blind man to be quiet-I mean will he shut up already! But the Bible says Bartimaeus called out even the more. *“Thou son of David, have mercy on me.”* Notice that he has not even asked Jesus to heal him at this point. He is simply calling out for mercy. Think of those Disciples who twice in the previous chapters had pushed for positions of prominence. Certainly, they deserved them, they were the ones following around Jesus all the time, right? But they were being prideful, thinking of themselves. Jesus had to teach them. In verse 45, the one immediately before where our reading began today, Jesus says, *“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (serve), and to give his life a ransom for many.”* And Jesus will respond to the humble, repentant, and faith-filled prayer of Bartimaeus. His sight would be restored that day. And more importantly, the faith he had in the Son of David, the Son of God, would ensure His eternal sight in the everlasting Kingdom of God.

But we are not quite done in seeing the contrast and learning from blind Bartimaeus. When they tell him that Jesus indeed would see him, what does he do? Verse 50, *“And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.”* Now this does not mean that Bartimaeus was naked when he came to Jesus! His garment here is the outer “cloak” as some modern translations put it. When beggars of that time sat to beg, they would have this outer cloak in their lap forming a place that they would collect their alms in. There was no hesitation. No counting of the cost. Bartimaeus got up and left his cloak with his money in it behind. Contrast this with that rich young ruler. When challenged by Jesus to give up his earthly wealth, he went away sad. But not Bartimaeus. He was all in!

Why? He had faith. He knew that He needed what Jesus had and that was more valuable than any earthly possession.

And staying on that theme of being willing to leave it all behind to follow Jesus, notice what verse 52 says, “*And immediately (there’s that word in Mark again!) he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.*” I have been wondering what happened to Bartimaeus after this, as he followed Jesus and the events of Holy Week would unfold. That will be something interesting to learn in eternity one day.

My prayer is that you now see the great importance of this text. This is not some “throwaway” miracle where Jesus just decided to heal someone on the way out of town for good measure. Bartimaeus is shown to be the example of what Jesus has been teaching about in these chapters. And how did Bartimaeus accomplish that? But pretty much doing nothing. He simply called out to Jesus in repentant faith. And Jesus acted and delivered him.

In summery here is what we learn from “Blind Bartimaeus” and how Jesus respond to him:

- We may not be physically blind, but our original state is spiritual blindness due to sin.
- We are beggars as well. Maybe not for money, but for what we cannot earn for ourselves: salvation from God.
- We must recognize that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and Son of Man who has saved us.
- We call out in prayerful humility, not entitlement. With a child-like faith we approach Jesus.
- We ask for mercy, and He gives it.

-We are willing to give anything up, suffer any earthly loss to follow Jesus:  
because in the end that is what eternally matters: knowing and following our  
Lord Jesus Christ!

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and  
minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen.