

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

October 24, 2021 – PENTECOST 22 / PROPER 25, YR. B

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Sermon: “*Teacher, Let Me See*”

Jeremiah 31:7-9 (Sing to the Lord with gladness; He will return the exiled)
Psalm 126 (When God restored Zion's fortune, they were glad)
Hebrews 7:23-28 (Christ, the High Priest, has been made perfect forever)
St. Mark 10:46-52 (Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus)

Who doesn't love blind Bartimaeus? Here's a man who knows what he wants and goes after it, no matter how much he embarrasses himself and everyone else. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” he shouts. His fellow townspeople are mortified. “Be quiet!” they warn. “Shut up, you screaming maniac! The one celebrity we get in this village and you *yell* at him?” Bartimaeus doesn't care. He is convinced Jesus has what he needs—and he's going after it! He will not be silenced.

We could learn a lot about boldness in prayer from Bartimaeus. We could also learn a lot about asking for what we need. But perhaps more important than Bartimaeus' persistence in this gospel story is Jesus' response to him. Bartimaeus is causing a ruckus, but, says St. Mark, “Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

This is one of the most important moments in the entirety of the gospels for telling us about who Jesus is. Although Jesus undoubtedly knows what is best for Bartimaeus, He does not force the situation. “Oh! You poor man! Let me heal you of your blindness immediately!” No. Jesus, respecting Bartimaeus' dignity and freedom of choice, asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Neither does Jesus impose His will on us. As candidly as He asks Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?” is as openly as He asks you and me. And just by asking this one question, Jesus provides us with a way to delve deeper, spiritually. It's a deceptively simple question. On the surface, it seems like a matter of exchange. What can we earn, or get, from our relationship with Christ? But if we spend time with this question we find new truths opening up within ourselves.

So, let's see how this question might work in our context. Jesus asks: “What do you want me to do for you?” *Well, first off, Jesus, it would be great if You would grow our church.* Is that really what we want? He asks us again, “What do you want me to do for you?” *Uh, could you magically make all our financial and membership worries go away?* Again, that would be wonderful, but that's not what we really, truly want, deep in our hearts. We know because He's asking us again, “What do you want me to do for you?” *Jesus, could you make our ministries a success?* Hmm. That doesn't feel quite right either. “What do you want me to do for you?” *Could you make us successful as disciples and ministers?* Nope, still not right.

But we're starting to dig through the layers of our egos as Jesus continues to ask us this pivotal question. If we tunnel down far enough, maybe we'll hit pay dirt: our hearts. “What do you want me to do for you?” *Help us to do more, to try harder, to do better,* we say to Jesus. Ah. Getting closer to the sincerest desire of our hearts, but not quite there yet. So, He asks us one more time with such gentle tenderness in His voice: “What is it you want me to do for you?” *Teacher, let me see.*

Now, Bartimaeus' words have become our words. *Let us see how loved we are; let us see how hungry for love others are; how worthy of love they are; how precious and beautiful our neighbors are. And let us see that all this love comes from You, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, God the Creator, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.*

“Teacher, let me see.” Excavating through all the immediate superficial answers, down through fear and ego, and the concerns of this world, we find at the core of our being the enormous desire to receive and share love, and the desire to receive and share God.

“Teacher, let me see.” *Let us see that beneath all the noise; past all the distractions; and beyond all the divisions that isolate us from You and one another is Your Presence that outlasts all Eternity. That is what we want You to do for us, Jesus. Let us see Your love. And then let us share it with everyone we know.*

Bartimaeus occupies a unique place in the gospel: his is both a healing story and a call story. It is his need for healing that enables his call and it is his call that is the final factor in his healing, when Jesus says to him: “Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed [Jesus] on the way.”

This is worth a closer look in our own lives, the relationship between healing and call, how very short a distance there is between the two, and how intermingled they are. Often we feel unequipped to answer the call that Christ places upon our lives. We think we are too broken and mixed up, sinful and apathetic, or trapped in a net of responsibilities and habits that seems inescapable, even for Gospel work. How could someone as “unhealed” as we are do anything important for Jesus?¹

But we do not have to wait for our complete inner (or outer) healing to answer Jesus’ call. Bartimaeus doesn’t. If you pay close attention, you’ll note that his healing takes place *after* he answers Jesus’ call. With an odd change of heart, the people in the crowd begin to urge Bart, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” St. Mark continues the narrative: “So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.” Still blind, unable to depend on any guidance from the people around him, Bartimaeus nevertheless responds to Jesus’ call with joy and abandon, and, throwing away his cloak, runs to the Lord.

This is not an insignificant moment. Remember, Bartimaeus was homeless, a blind beggar on the street. His cloak was his only asset. It was his only protection from the weather and the cold, the closest thing to shelter he had. Yet he cast it away without a second thought, and *still blind, still unhealed*, answered the call to make his way to Jesus. God is able to give us the grace to do the same.

And, in perhaps the most remarkable turn in this story, Bartimaeus is not the only one healed and called. Did you catch who else had a radical conversion? The crowd. They begin with cruelty and exclusion in their hearts, doing everything they can to keep Bartimaeus away from Christ: “Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’”

Next comes the pivotal moment. Jesus does not call Bartimaeus directly. He tells *the crowd* to call Bartimaeus: “Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’” Then comes the redemption, so easy to skip over if you’re not paying close attention: “And *they* called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’” This is the moment of the *crowd’s* conversion, the *crowd’s* healing, and the *crowd’s* call. Jesus’ love is so subversive and powerful that it breaks open their hardened hearts even as they likely failed to notice.

They go from trying to keep people away from Jesus to urging them toward Him. They go from seeing Bartimaeus as an embarrassment, trying to shut him up and keep him hidden, to telling him to take heart and go forward into Jesus’ loving and healing embrace.

What we learn here is that our call is never individual. It’s not a solo act. We hear our Christian call in community. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, Jesus calls the crowd, the crowd calls Bartimaeus, then Jesus calls Bartimaeus to follow Him on the Way. This entire process of call and response is healing and restorative for everyone involved.

So where do we start? We listen, and we call out to Jesus, just as Bartimaeus did: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Because our Lord is always calling and always healing. Moving forward for us begins with Jesus’ simple question: “What do you want me to do for you?” In answer, let us take to heart Bartimaeus’ words: “Teacher, let me see.”

I’d like to close with an adaptation of a Roman Catholic prayer for the healing of eyesight: “God of Mercy and Love, You are the God who brings healing and comfort to us. Heal us, and we shall be healed. May our eyes shine brightly, that we may see Your goodness in the land of the living. Fill our hearts with hope, that we may continue to stand firm in our faith, even when everything around us seems to not be going well. In Jesus’ name, we believe and pray. Amen.”²

¹ Adapt. Whitney Rice “What Do You Want Me to Do for You,” [EpiscopalChurch.org](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/what-do-you-want-me-to-do-for-you-pentecost-22-b-october-24-2021/), 24 October 24 2021, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/what-do-you-want-me-to-do-for-you-pentecost-22-b-october-24-2021/> 16 October 2021. Used with permission.

² Adapt. “Prayer for the Blind,” [Prayerist.com](https://prayerist.com/prayer/theblind/), n.d. <https://prayerist.com/prayer/theblind/> 18 October 2021. Used with permission.