

What Do You See?
Seattle First Baptist Church
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Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 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?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.
The word of God for the people of God, thanks be to God.

The story of blind Bartimaeus is important to me because, I have had poor vision my whole life. Without corrective lenses, I am legally blind. I have a hereditary eye condition called karataconis—which is irregularly shaped corneas. I started wearing glasses in first grade, wore contact lenses for 25 years, had two corneal transplants, and I will be wearing glasses all the remaining days of my life. So the gospel stories about blindness and vision really speak to me.

I may never have 20/20 vision, yet I am grateful for every beautiful sunrise, every exploding dahlia, the color purple, and every beautiful child of God. I am grateful for what I can see. But the question comes to me, although we can see, what are we not seeing. With all that we can see around us, a never ending pandemic, environmental racism in BIPOC communities, homelessness, culture wars, and higher and higher food prices, what are we not seeing that we really need to see? With our perfect or nearly perfect 20/20 vision, what are we missing?

A friend of mine, Rev. Dr. Patricia Cone frequently talks about seeing with God eyes—which is seeing with our eyes and our hearts. If we were using our God-eyes, what would we be seeing that we are not seeing now. Perhaps the story of Bartimaeus will give us some insight on seeing with God-eyes.

Jesus and the crowd were on their way out of Jericho when Bartimaeus heard crowd noises. Jesus' reputation of being a healer and a radical interpreter their sacred text preceded him everywhere he traveled. Wherever Jesus went, a crowd formed. In fact scripture tells us, Jesus had to work hard to get away from the pressure of crowds. In our text today a crowd surrounded Jesus even as he left the town of Jericho.

When Bartimaeus found out the crowd noises were because Jesus was passing by, he raised his voice to get Jesus' attention. ***Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. In other words, Jesus help me.*** Because of his blindness, Bartimaeus was totally dependent on the generosity of

others—and he obviously didn't like that social arrangement. Bartimaeus would give anything to see and to be able to take care of himself. He wanted to be independent and not dependent on the kindness of strangers.

Bartimaeus didn't care who heard him calling for Jesus. Bartimaeus didn't care who saw him, or whom he might offend or embarrass. He had to get Jesus' attention. It was his one shot at a better life. **Jesus help me!** When we are desperate and in need of healing, wholeness, and hope. **Jesus help me**—works. When we have reached the end of our rope and are holding on by a thread, **Jesus help me**—will lengthen the threads of our patience just a bit longer.

Now the crowd accompanying Jesus, included his disciples and other followers. When they heard Bartimaeus crying out for Jesus. They shushed him. Ssshhs. No one likes to be shushed. And if we look closely at who was trying to shush Bartimaeus, it was the disciples and other followers of Jesus. It was those able bodied, fully seeing, privileged disciples that were trying to shush this disabled man.

And get this, those in the crowd had seen Jesus heal before. He had already healed a man who was deaf, another who was blind and he'd fed multitudes with a few fish and loaves of bread. So those in the crowd knew what Jesus could do. They knew Jesus could heal Bartimaeus. But they shushed Bartimaeus and wanted him to go away. Ssshhs. Bartimaeus didn't care. He was determined. **Jesus, help me. Jesus over here!**

The story of Bartimaeus' healing is as much about the crowd as it is about Bartimaeus. It is hard to wrap our brains around the text that reads those closest to Jesus were trying to keep others away from Jesus. Those closest to the source of power, healing, and hope, tried to keep away those in desperate need of healing and hope. In this story we have the in crowd of Jesus followers, trying to exclude anyone else from getting into their circle. The insiders tried as hard as they could to keep at bay those on the outside.

Many of us deal with this inside outside struggle every day. On our jobs, there are those who have a meeting before the meeting that we'll be in. You know the group, they informally meet around the virtual water cooler and decide how the meeting is going to go before the meeting begins. There is the intentional attempt to keep the insider group making decision for those left on the outside.

This is also happening politically now. Voting districts are being gerrymandered before the 2022 elections to keep BIPOC from having a voting bloc. Restricting early voting, eliminating polling places in communities of color, no drop boxes in communities of color, no Sunday voting, and requiring voter ID, are all about keeping power for the insiders and keeping the outsiders in the margins.

And even in some churches we have the insider/ outsider dynamic. Members that have been around for decades want to keep making decisions, holding power, and believing everything is

fine, all the while keeping in the margins young people and those new to the household of faith.

Bartimaeus was in the margins, on the outside and just wanted to see.

Bartimaeus knew he was physically blind and couldn't see, but theologian Victor McCracken in *Feasting on the Word* wrote that those in the crowd were spiritually blind to Jesus' real purpose on earth. Woe unto those who have eyes, yet who refuse to see.

But this is not the only place in the Christian scriptures where the disciples and followers of Jesus felt entitled and wanted to keep their place of privilege. The story right before Bartimaeus' healing is the story of James and John where these two brothers wanted to be seated at the right and left of Jesus when he came into his kingdom. Jesus told them, you have no idea what you are asking and furthermore, that is not my decision to make as to who gets to sit at what place in the heavenly realm. And in our scripture today a whole crowd was acting out their entitlement, by keeping the insiders in and the outsiders out.

I'm so glad that Jesus flipped the script of insider/ outsider; powerful/ powerless; chosen/ not chosen. Jesus came specifically for those relegated to the position of outsiders. Jesus heard Bartimaeus' cry in spite of the crowd around him. Oh, to see with God eyes the hurt and pain of those around us and reach out and meet those needs instead of making excuses and saying I'm not a bad person.

When Jesus heard Bartimaeus' cry of desperation, he stopped and stood still. My friends sometimes we need to stop, stand still, and listen for the needs around us. We can get so busy doing church work, planning a meeting, setting the agenda, sending the invites, getting the minutes together, and thinking about refreshments, that we forget to do the work of the church. Now I'm not mad at anybody, I'm just speaking the truth. When Jesus recognized the cry for help, Jesus stopped and stood still. Then he said, call him here.

There are two pieces of good news in this story. First the crowd changed their tune from shushing Bartimaeus to telling him, cheer up, Jesus is calling you. Go see him and see what he wants. So although the crowd wanted to run things and do it their way, they at least had an ear to hear Jesus and a heart to follow Him.

The second piece of goodness is that Bartimaeus was healed. When Jesus called Bartimaeus forward, Bartimaeus threw off his coat, left his former life and all those things that no longer served him, and went all in for Jesus. He took the risk to cry out for healing and Jesus heard his cry and healed his eyes. Jesus didn't have to touch Bartimaeus in order for him to be healed. He was healed because of his faith. Bartimaeus knew what Jesus could do and wouldn't allow the crowd to deter him, define him, or silence his faith. Jesus told Bartimaeus your faith has healed you.

When Bartimaeus was healed, he too became a follower of Jesus. When the Holy One heals our bodies, puts a hedge of protection around us, blesses our families, gives us the desires of our

hearts, and walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death, in gratitude we must do like Bartimaeus— throw off our coats, leave behind ego, outdated theologies, and bigoted attitudes that no longer serve us. And in gratitude with thanksgiving, we must go all in and follow the way of Jesus.

And for us to go all in means to look for the need around us, and to listen to those who cry out for justice. We don't have to look far with our God eyes to really see where we can make a difference. We can look across the street and see our unhoused neighbors. We can look across the region and see houses of faith that continue to be targets of hate crimes, and we can look across the country and see our immigrant siblings who need a hand up and not just a hand out. And, we can look down the pew with our God eyes and make sure there is plenty good room for our BIPOC siblings and friends.

After his healing Bartimaeus got busy and followed the way of Jesus. My friends, what do you see today, that needs a sacred touch? What do you see that needs to be healed? Let us not act like the crowd that wanted Bartimaeus to be quiet and go away. Let us listen to the voices of those crying out for healing, respect, and inclusion. Let us welcome all those searching for a place of belonging, a place of hope, and a place of love. My friends, what do you see? What will you do?