

Shedding Light on the Subject

[Text - Mark 10:46-52]

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This morning's New Testament reading seems like the perfect set-up. Bartimeaus, a blind beggar, stands before Jesus, a wise and compassionate healer. So Jesus says to him... "What do you want me to do for you?" [Really?] You'd think that an insightful individual like Jesus might deduce the obvious: that a person who is *blind*, crying out for mercy, is hoping for, oh - I don't know - *eyesight*? That certainly seems like a reasonable assumption. But here's the thing - as a truly wise and compassionate healer, Jesus doesn't assume anything about anyone. Instead, he treats each person as a unique and precious individual; listening to what he or she has to say, before taking action. So Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimeaus responds, "I want to regain my sight." O.K.! Now Jesus knows how to proceed. "Go your way," Jesus tells him, "your faith has made you well." And immediately, he regained his sight.

This morning, I'd like us to examine this ancient interaction between Bartimeaus and Jesus, to try to discover how you and I might become more effective partners in Christ's healing work today. The first significant thing this encounter shows us, is that when dealing with any kind of infirmity - either in our own lives, or in someone else's - it's important for us to determine what is actually desired. Even though it might seem like a given - that a person would *want* to be helped or healed - that may not always be the case. Sometimes, consciously or unconsciously, there may be intermingled with our affliction a lingering desire to retain that particular ailment or problem. After all, that affliction *can* elicit sympathy or pity. It may provide us an escape from facing our past actions or our current responsibilities. Or perhaps we become so accustomed to identifying with that sense of brokenness, that it feels as if we cannot let it go. Even though our condition, affliction, or addiction may be difficult to bear, the prospect of no longer being "that way" frightens and paralyzes us - so we develop a kind of tolerable *ease*, with our own *dis*-ease. Bartimeaus may have gotten used to sitting by the roadside, begging for his livelihood. It may not have been the best way to make a living, but for him it had become a way of life. And as many of us know, change can be scary; not only for the individual involved, but also for the family, or the larger community. We get accustomed to living a particular way, and relating to one another with certain established roles and expectations. So sometimes, even those closest to us will subconsciously resist our attempts to get better, because it would throw our family or group dynamics out of wack. Yet there comes a time when we realize that there really are different and better ways of living and interacting. For Bartimeaus, it may have begun with hearing stories about Jesus of Nazareth, a remarkable teacher and healer - one who has a wonderful reputation for resorting people's lives, especially those people who are relegated to the fringes of society.

So on that fateful day, as Jesus is passing through Jericho, Bartimeaus decides to take a chance. He cries out from his darkness, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those around him tell him to be quiet; but he cries-out even louder, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then, when Jesus asks him to clarify what he means, Bartimeaus turns that general cry for *mercy*, into a specific request: "Teacher, I want to regain my sight." And with that definitive request, Bartimeaus is ready to hear Christ's compassionate words of affirmation and wholeness: "Go your way," Jesus tells him, "your faith has made you well!" *Your* faith, has made you well. With those words, Jesus assures Bartimeaus, and us, that we do have a part to play in determining how the Holy One can touch and affect our lives.

Imagine for a moment, if Jesus were to ask you today, "What do *you* want me to do for you?"What, if anything, would you ask for? And if you *would* ask for something to make your life better, is there anything that your yourself can do - right now - to help make it so? It seems to me, that if we're going to call upon the Divine Source of Life to impact our lives, we need to figure out where we actually want our Life's direction to take us - so that we ourselves can help, rather than hinder, the process. "Mercy" is what Bartimaeus initially requests; but Jesus asks him to get more specific: "*How*, exactly, would Divine Mercy manifest itself in your life?" Bartimaeus realizes that, for him, "mercy" would involve regaining his sight. And maybe for some of us, a Divine Gift of Mercy could also include having our vision restored.

There can be times when we feel completely unfocused or unsure about where our life is headed. In those times, perhaps the best prayer we can manage, is a vague and desperate cry for "mercy!" Yet even from that ambiguous starting point, the Divine Source of Mercy can move us forward toward a renewed sense of clarity and purpose. And even though our ultimate destination may not be clear, we realize that at least we are finally on the right path, and that we do not need to travel that path alone.

Bartimaeus not only got what he wanted; he also what he needed: mercy, renewed vision, *and* a new beginning - a pretty remarkable collection for a poor, blind beggar! Yet what's also remarkable, is the fact that we know his name! In most of the stories of Jesus' healings, the one who is healed isn't specifically named. However, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, is remembered by name. The reason for this may be quite simple. When Jesus says to Bartimaeus, "Go *your* way, your faith has made you well," Bartimaeus immediately begins to follow Jesus. Quite possibly, Bartimaeus is known to the early Christian writers because "his way" has become the Way of Jesus Christ. And just imagine what an extraordinary follower Bartimaeus would be.

As one who has received mercy, he can show tremendous mercy to others.
As one who has been shunned and "shushed" and shoved-aside, he would have an exceptional understanding and compassion for those who society or religion tend to scorn or silence, ostracize or oppress.
And as one who has regained his vision, he now has a keen insight to help others find their way.

No longer sitting alone in the dust and darkness, Bartimaeus has discovered a new light, a new life, a new community, and a new beginning - Divine gifts, graciously extended to him. Divine gifts which are also offered to you and me today. No matter who we are or where we are in our Life's journey, we too are invited to take hold of the extravagant love and grace that is revealed in Jesus Christ:

A love that listens to our cries for help and mercy;
A love that encourages us to clarify what we truly want, and to recognize what we genuinely need;
A love that can radiate from us to all those around us, as you and I continue to offer help and healing, compassion and grace, light and kindness to every person we encounter!