

Sermon “Sight and Insight”
Reverend Lisa Eleck
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Mark 10: 46-52

46 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. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then 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.’ ⁵²Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

SERMON “Sight and Insight”

Did you see Jesus? I mean I didn’t “see” him initially. I was blind, you know. Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Bartimaeus. I was a blind beggar in Jericho.

Anyway I had heard that Jesus was in Jericho. I knew he was in Jericho because he caused quite commotion wherever he went. And people had started to gather. Then I heard the crowd, those people that were with Jesus. Jesus was coming my way. He was going to walk right past me. I couldn’t believe it. It was amazing. I thought, “He can heal me. I know he can.” Jesus healed people all the time. I had heard all about his healings and his teaching. Oh, how I wanted to meet him. He saw people for who they are – who they are as people, not where they stand in society, not how society sees them.

Jesus showed mercy on people that society saw as useless. People like me – the blind, the lame, widows, children, people with leprosy, the ones possessed by demons, the poor.

Yes, Jesus was pretty radical. He was a healer and a teacher. He even fed whole crowds of people. I knew that he must have been a prophet, a special one of God. No. More than that, for some reason, I could see that he was from the family of David. I know I said “see.” What I mean is I could tell that he came from that sacred lineage, the House of David. Jesus was more than an ordinary man. In my gut, in my being, I knew that. And I couldn’t wait for him to walk by.

So I called out to him. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

But some in the crowd couldn’t stand to have a blind beggar calling out to Jesus, bothering Jesus. They wanted Jesus for themselves, for the people who were accepted by society. They didn’t want him to notice someone like me. They thought I or my parents had done something

wrong for me to be blind. Not only did being blind mean you had done something bad, but it made it hard for your life to be good.

Think about it. In Jerico or Jerusalem or anywhere, you often lived on the street and resorted to begging to get enough money to eat when you were blind. You had your cloak to keep you warm when it was cold, dry when it rained, and to put on the ground in front of you to catch the coins that people gave to you when they pitied you. Thank God I had my cloak. Without my cloak, I would have been cold, and wet, and penniless.

So, anyway, I called out to Jesus and the people “sternly ordered” me to be quiet. That’s the polite way of saying that they yelled at me. They told me to “shut up” or “be quiet” or “who do you think you are, calling out to Jesus?” They didn’t want me to bother Jesus. They didn’t think I was worth Jesus’ time or attention. They didn’t think I was worth anything.

But, I wouldn’t let them stop me. No. Jesus had mercy on people like me. Maybe he would have mercy on me too. Maybe he could heal me. Maybe in his mercy, he would heal me. Maybe, maybe he’d heal me and I would see...

So the more the crowd tried to shush me, the louder I yelled. Again I called out to him. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

And he heard me! Can you believe it? Jesus heard me!

Jesus stopped. Dead in his tracks he stopped. He stopped. He told them, ‘Call him here.’ Jesus told them to have me go to him.

And they told me, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’

How about that? Once Jesus called me to himself, the crowd changed its tune. Did those people suddenly care about me, Bartimaeus, that blind beggar? Did they suddenly see me as a person of value? Did their blindness to me as a person drop from their eyes? Did they really care about me? Or did they just want to look good to Jesus? I’ll never know.

But as soon as I heard that Jesus would see me, I jumped up. I threw my cloak on the ground! Can you believe it? I threw off my cloak; my warmth, my beggars’ tool, my security... I just tossed it away. I was so excited! Did I actually think that I might not still need it, that I might be welcomed back into society, that I might have a future? Or was it an unconscious act, excitement in the moment.

It doesn’t matter now. But at the time, I ran up to Jesus. I might have bumped into a person or two in my haste. But that didn’t matter. I was standing in front of Jesus and he asked me what I wanted him to do for me. Plain and simple, “What do you want me to do for you?” It was an amazing moment. I was standing in front of Jesus, that prophet from the House of David was speaking to me – a beggar, a blind man, a nobody.

So, I told him, "My Teacher, let me see again." I wasn't yelling anymore. I was standing right there in front of Jesus. I could feel his compassion, his strength, his goodness... his love.

And he said to me 'Go; your faith has made you well.'

Immediately I could see again. It was a moment I will never be able to truly describe. The joy of being able to see. The awe of standing face to face with Jesus. There are no adequate words...

Jesus told me to "go," that my faith had made me well.

My faith? Is that what made me so insistent in calling to Jesus? My faith? Is that what produced this miracle? I'm not so sure.

It was Jesus that healed me. There are lots of people who have faith but for some reason I was healed. I will never know why I was healed. But I couldn't just "Go," as Jesus said.

Yes, I could rejoin society. I didn't need that beggar's cloak anymore. I could stand tall. I could live a more normal life. But... where would I go. I couldn't go away. I had to follow Jesus. I just had to. He healed me.

But more than that, he saw me and he helped me see. It's a wonderful thing to be able to see – the beauty of the blue sky and all those other amazing colors, the road in front of me and the rocks on the path that I used to trip over, the faces of people and the emotions that their eyes express, and the antics of children and the smiles on their faces.

But I can also see that there are people like me, like I was, on the edge of society, struggling, not seen as a person deserving of attention. As I follow Jesus, I can see others and their struggles more clearly. I can reach out to them as Jesus called out to me.

Jesus is my Teacher, and I still have a lot to learn. But as I follow him, I know he will help me to see what I need to see as his follower, that he will "help me see, again." And again. And again. I need Jesus to help me see, to see the joy and the struggle of others more clearly. And I hope and pray that I will be able to bring others to Jesus, to help them follow Jesus and to see his mercy, to see his compassion, and to see and feel his love.

