

“WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?”

Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-54

March 11, 2018

Rev. Jerry Duggins

A blind man is brought to Jesus. We don't know if he wanted this, what he may have expected from Jesus, or even if he had been following the events surrounding Jesus. We know nothing of his faith. We know only that a group wanted to bring this blind man and Jesus together. The man is silent.

Later, another blind man wants to encounter Jesus, but the group wants to prevent it. Bartimaeus will not be silenced, but cries out all the more to be heard. He is eager to “see” Jesus.

Jesus leads the first blind man away from the crowd, out of the village, and seems to struggle to effect the cure. He must touch the man's eyes twice before it is complete. Again, we know nothing of his desire for healing or his faith that Jesus could heal him. He remains silent.

Bartimaeus is healed on the spot, publicly, with just a word, and with the assertion that his faith made him well.

The first blind man is told to keep silent about the healing. Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way and presumably remains as vocal as he was before the healing.

Less obvious to the reader is the first man's insider status. He has friends among the Jewish community willing to act for his benefit. Contrast this with Bartimaeus' outsider status. He must speak on his own behalf and against the wishes of the crowd following Jesus.

Just about every commentator on these stories agrees that they go together, and yet the committee that makes suggestions for which texts to read on Sundays includes one but not the other. If preachers work only from the proposed readings they will talk only about Bartimaeus, the blind man with faith, the shining example of discipleship and never about the blind man who cannot speak for himself, the blind man whom Jesus struggles to heal... the blind man who is in fact most like us.

Who among us is eager to have their blind spots exposed? Who among us is willing to publicly announce our need for mercy? Even when we are aware our ignorance or need, we still require coaxing from friends to seek help. And even then we are resistant to change. We are a great deal more like the first blind man than we are like Bartimaeus, at least most of us are. And if you look closely at the stories between the two healings, you will discover that the disciples are more like the first blind man as well. As Jesus turns toward Jerusalem, toward the suffering of the cross, Mark gives us this

image of the faithful disciple, a blind man who not only believes that Jesus can set him free from his infirmity, but wants him to.

What do you want me to do for you? I want to see.

Seeing is precisely what the disciples have trouble doing. After the healing of the first blind man, Jesus asks his disciple: "Who do you say that I am?" Peter gives a perfectly correct answer, but is clueless about what it means. When Jesus tells them that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise again, the disciples refuse to listen. When the disciples fail to exorcise an evil spirit from a boy, Jesus essentially tells them that they forgot to pray, that this sort of ministry requires a nearness to God... which they don't seem to have or even want. When James and John ask Jesus to do something for them and he asks the same question that he asked of Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?" they ask for positions of authority when Jesus "comes into his kingdom."

So where are you between these two healings? In your Lenten reflections are you striving to draw near to God, to deepen in the life of prayer, or do you prefer to rely on your insider status? Are you following Jesus on the way to the cross or still calculating what gain you might acquire by your connection to Jesus? Do you really want to see or will you have to be dragged into having your eyes opened?

The disciples walk with Jesus to Jerusalem, but they are expecting a coronation, not the suffering that so frequently comes to those who resist the evil intent of those in authority. They want resurrection without crucifixion. Not so with Bartimaeus. He wants to see and I think he knows what to expect. Faith is not "a what's in it for me proposition" but a desire to see things as they are, an ability to keep moving in the face of suffering, a commitment to the things of God over against the selfish intentions of earthly powers and authorities.

What do you want Jesus to do for you? Do you want to see? The journey to the cross is a journey of growing awareness. Are we willing not only to see the hungry, but to understand the causes of their hunger and to stand with them in their need? Are we willing not only to see the victims of oppression, those who are bullied, threatened and abused, but to advocate for justice? To walk with Jesus is to walk with those who have not been given a fair shake in life, to side with those who have been marginalized. To see is to listen to the cries of the poor, of the homeless, and the displaced.

What do you want Jesus to do for you? Do you want to see? The good news is that you don't have to be all in like Bartimaeus. God is willing to work with you where you are. Most of us come to sight only gradually. We are, in our day, still walking with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, still learning about those who suffer, still learning how best to stand with them. So few have their eyes opened all at once. But Jesus is willing, slowly or quickly. What do you want? Do you want to see? Amen.