

October 24, 2021
The Rev. Susan Plucker

Mark 10:46-52

The healing of Bartimaeus...
What is it all about?

During the brief years of Jesus' ministry,
People still got sick, lame, blind, suffered, and died.
Jesus did not physically heal everyone
Or even a great number of people.

Nor was he the only healer around.
We have stories of his own disciples healing in his name.
There are also writings about other healers of that time;
For example, Hanina ben Dosa and Honi the Circledrawer.

From all that we can gather from the gospel stories,
Jesus never healed in private,
He never healed simply to amaze and impress.
He healed to teach;
To teach about God.

According to our gospel writer,
This is the last miracle of Jesus.
Jesus is passing through Jericho
On his way to Jerusalem.

Jericho is a large oasis city,
The oldest walled settlement (9000 BC),
And lowest town in the world (800 feet below sea level).

By the time of Jesus, Herod had built a palace, aqueducts, an amphitheater,
Hippodrome and even a swimming pool there.
Jericho's roads were heavily traveled
And at Passover, the traffic was intense.

One can imagine how this time and place
Would attract beggars, counting on folks to be in a generous mood,
Such as today at holiday times.

But notice, this beggar's outcry was not for money,
As he loudly shrieks at Jesus, "Have mercy on me!",
Not allowing the crowd to silence him
Until Jesus responds.

Jesus' response is, as it often was, a question:
"What do you want me to do for you?"

That phrase may sound familiar.

Recalling last week, Jesus asked the disciples James and John:
"What do you want me to do for you?"

I think that Mark is trying to catch our attention here with Bartimaeus.

Do you remember what James and John asked for?

"Let us sit at your right hand and left
When you come into your kingdom."
How selfish, self-seeking is that?

And at first glance,

Bartimaeus' request to "see again" could possibly be considered
as selfish as well,
but it quickly loses that consideration
as we move to the end of the story.

Jesus said to Bartimaeus:

"Go, your faith has made you well."
Immediately, we're told, he regained his sight
And followed Jesus on the way,
Followed Jesus on the way to Jerusalem
On the way to the cross!

"Go", Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well",
Not what you have done,
Not the good deeds of your past,
Not as recompense for your suffering,

The moral character of Bartimaeus, his past, his parentage,
Even his present plight does not seem to be relevant to Jesus.
It is his faith that Jesus singles out....
"Your faith has made you well."

Faith in what?

The reputation of Jesus?

Probably, yes...
But even more that that...

His faith in a God spirited, merciful response from Jesus.

Bartimaeus repeatedly called Jesus, "Son of David",
David, favored of God,
If one is familiar with the story of David, as Bartimaeus surely was.

The man Jesus, just by his presence, conveyed hope to Bartimaeus,

The hope of the showering of God's mercies upon him
Just as they had been showered upon David,

Just as they had been showered on the people of Israel
Every time they returned to God.

Mercy is not the same as justice.

Mercy, thank God," goes well beyond what we deserve.
God's mercies are God's favors, God's gifts to us.

This is how God operates.

This is why we, like Bartimaeus, can have the full assurance of hope.

Bartimaeus received two gifts, two favors, two mercies:

The most obvious, the return of his sight,

The less obvious,

The opportunity to follow Jesus.

Jesus is not just healing a particular person here.

Like I said earlier, he is also teaching,
Still teaching James and John and the others,
(Those who have ears to hear)

As they travel toward Jerusalem.

Jesus won't always be with them.

When he is gone, they are going to have to turn to God.

What should they ask for from God?

What can they hope to expect from God?

Perhaps the two following vignettes will assist our understanding.

The first is told by a man battling a malignant tumor in his spine.

Jesus appeared to him in "something of a vision" he says
"somehow by the Sea of Galilee".

The man relates:

"Jesus silently took up handfuls of water and poured them over my head and back till water ran down my puckered scar. Then he spoke once: 'Your sins are forgiven,' and turned to shore again, done with me. I came on behind him, thinking in standard, greedy fashion: 'it's not my sins I'm worried about!'"

What should we ask for? What can we expect?

C.S. Lewis in his book, The Weight of Glory, tells us this:

"If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mudpies because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea, we are far too easily pleased."

What do we really want and desire?
What do you want Jesus to do for you?

Let me put it this way:
Do you want to use God merely for requesting
What you think you deserve or need or want?

Or do you dare to request God's mercy,
Willing to accept whatever that might be?
Do you dare to request God's mercy
Willing to have your eyes opened?
Do you dare to request God's mercy,
Even if your lives are changed in some way
You have not yet imagined?
As you too, are given the opportunity to follow Jesus?

This sermon is simply meant to be food for thought;
Our thoughts regarding our relationship with God,
Our thoughts about following Jesus.

Here is one more morsel to add to the mix.

St. Augustine made a marvelous distinction between
Two kinds of love;
In Latin, *uti* and *frui*.
Uti love is love of "use."
I love money.
I love my car.
I love my phone.

I love these things because I can use them to accomplish my desires.

Frui love is the love of "enjoyment."
I love chocolate.
I love hiking.
I love friends.
I love playing the piano.

If we return to our two gospel scenarios with James and John
And then Bartimaeus
Hearing Jesus ask in each one:
"What do you want me to do for you?",

It's pretty obvious that James and John
Want to love Jesus, in that *uti* way, use Jesus to accomplish their own desires.
With Bartimaeus, it's not so obvious, is it?
As he pleads for God's mercy, God's love.

But as he turns to follow Jesus, then I think we can name that action *frui* love,
loving Jesus just to simply be in his presence
And follow where he leads.

Do we dare ask for the desire, the love, to be in the presence of God
And follow where God leads?
To be in the presence of Jesus
And follow where Jesus leads?
To be in the presence of the Holy Spirit
And follow where the Spirit leads?

There is a scripture passage in Luke (10:17-24)
That I find delightfully full of this sense of *frui* love.

The seventy disciples, after being sent out, have returned with joy
Reporting great success in their ministry.
And in turn, Jesus is almost beside himself with joy.

Luke tells us that Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and thanked God
That the disciples saw God's power,
God's love for the world at work
Through them.

And with an exclamation point in the text conveying his excitement,
He told them: "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!"

Uti love	<i>frui</i> love
James and John	Bartimaeus

I believe that each new day Jesus is waiting to say to us
As he said to blind Bartimaeus
As he said to James and John
And as he probably said to many others along the way,

What do you want me to do for you?

What do you want me to do for you?

One possible response is:
Fill me with the desire to be in your presence
And the joy to follow where you lead.