

*Giving To See*  
Mark 10.46-52  
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October 26, 2003  
Presbyterian Church in Sudbury

### **Introduction to the Morning Lesson**

My text this morning is the last few verses of Mark 10. Immediately after this Jesus went to Jerusalem and a few days later was crucified. So the end of chapter ten is the climax of all that Mark says about Jesus leading up to his dying on the cross. The last thing Jesus did before going to Jerusalem was to heal a blind man named Bartimaeus.

A couple of chapters earlier, Jesus healed another blind man (Mark 8.22-26) and everything between these two healings was a journey towards Jerusalem where the cross awaited. Everything between these two stories of the blind being healed was a crash course in discipleship, for according to Mark, being a disciple of Jesus means *seeing* who Jesus really is. The first disciples were often blind but the blind were able to see. That means there is hope for us. Let's read it in Mark 10.

Mark 10.46-52 (NRSV)

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.

### **Introduction**

My mother had a favorite expression she would always say when a new thought crossed her mind or an insight dawned on her. "I see," said the blind man, who couldn't see at all." I like my mother's expression and I often repeat it. I like it because it poses the puzzler of how we see things when we can't see. How do we see what we're not seeing? A woman saw a bumper sticker that said "Start Seeing Motorcycles." She didn't know she wasn't seeing motorcycles and then realized that was the point.<sup>1</sup> How do we begin to see something we don't know we are missing?

The text tells about a blind man who could see and when he saw we're told he immediately followed Jesus "on the way." What way is that? Jerusalem was the next stop.

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<sup>1</sup> Mary E. Hinkle, "Seeing Things," online, <http://www.christiancentury.org/>, Internet, 8 Sep. 2003.

Jesus was going to the cross and true disciples go with him.<sup>2</sup> The way of Jesus is always the way of the cross. Bartimaeus saw that and we if we don't see it, we're missing the real Jesus. Here are a couple of questions to help us see.

### **ONE: Who can help us see?**

The first question is, who can help us see? Who can sharpen our vision to see as true disciples of Jesus Christ? We may not like the answer but the text says the ones who can help us are those we see all too often — on the street corner, under bridges, and outside convenience stores. They are the unemployed, the homeless, the dirty, and the alone. Like Bartimaeus they are left to beg for money and food to keep themselves alive. Sometimes they ask us for help, and in our busyness, we consider this an annoyance. Sometimes they frighten us. They seem so different, unlike us or our friends. But they can help us see.

We may wonder, are there not better role models for disciples of Jesus? The text suggests, maybe not. Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" If you'll recall last Sunday's sermon, Jesus asked the very same question to his disciples James and John. That's what Pastor McCollum was talking about last Sunday. James and John came to Jesus to ask for a favor and he asked them what they wanted him to do for them. It's very clear that the writer of Mark's Gospel wants us to pay attention to the contrasting answers to Jesus' question.

When Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants, the blind man answers that he just wants to see. When James and John are asked what they want, they answer that they want to sit in the power seats next to him when he begins to rule things. They want to be with Jesus when he's in charge.

Now as Sid was saying last week, this shows that James and John (and by extension the rest of the disciples) were very slow learners. But before that it also shows their faith because they absolutely believe that Jesus is going to make it to the top.<sup>3</sup> Despite dire predictions even from Jesus himself, despite increasing hostility from those who opposed Jesus, the disciples are quite sure he's going to win and they want to be there with him when he does. This is the ultimate example of political coattails. The disciples believed that Jesus was going to reign in power and they wanted to be dragged into power with him.

Barbara Brown Taylor, who teaches at Piedmont College and Columbia Seminary, says the problem with what James and John wanted was not their faith that Jesus was going to end up victorious. The problem was that they thought that the new world was going to be just like the old world only with new leadership. When Jesus rules things, the bad guys are going to be replaced, Jesus will be the head honcho, and the most loyal

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<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem is for Mark's Jesus a code word for the cross. André Resner, Jr. writing in Roger E. Van Harn, ed., *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The Third Readings (The Gospels)* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001) 264.

<sup>3</sup> A point made by Barbara Brown Taylor, *Bread of Angels* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1997) 43.

members of his campaign staff will sit on either side of him and be rewarded by him.<sup>4</sup>

“But it doesn’t work that way,” Jesus said for the umpteenth time. The disciples couldn’t see that but blind Bartimaeus did. He didn’t ask Jesus for anything except sight and the irony of the story is that he already had it.

He had it because he wasn’t embarrassed to claim Jesus as King. He shouted, “Jesus, Son of David.” That means he saw Jesus as being in the royal line of King David. When Jesus called to him, Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, that is, his outer garment. A beggar, particularly a blind beggar, would hang onto his cloak for dear life. It was the only thing that protected him from the elements. But getting to Jesus was more important than protection.

You see, Bartimaeus was down and dirty and desperate. He had nothing to lose and everything to gain. He saw that Jesus is the only one who can turn the old world upside down and make a new world where there is room for the down and dirty and desperate. “Just let me see,” he said. That is perfect discipleship in Mark’s Gospel and we need to look at the lowly to help us see that.

### **TWO: What do we need to see?**

Who can help us see? The lowly. And the second question follows from that. What do we need to see? We need to see what is normally invisible to us, because then we will see Jesus.

I said at the beginning that this story about Bartimaeus occurs at the end of a section beginning in chapter eight that describes a crash course in discipleship. Many times in chapters eight, nine, and ten Jesus points to that which was “invisible” to help the disciples see. In a murder mystery by Sue Grafton, the murderer turns out to be a 60-year-old woman who is 30 pounds overweight. After the mystery is solved, the detective reflects that the woman nearly got away with it simply because no one would remember seeing someone like her. Nothing about her made her noticeable. For all practical purposes she was invisible.<sup>5</sup> So it was with a children in Jesus’ day. In chapter nine the disciples were arguing about which of them was the greatest and Jesus took a little child — socially invisible in that society — and put it in front of the disciples to help them see. “Do you see this child?” Jesus asked. “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9.37)

The point is we need to start seeing that which is often invisible to us. We need to start seeing the invisible, not because it is virtuous to do so, not so that we can congratulate ourselves on being the greatest at seeing. Start seeing the invisible because to receive the invisible one is to receive Jesus and to receive Jesus is to know there is a divine presence in all of life.

The writer E. B. White once described his thoughts as he watched his wife

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor, 43.

<sup>5</sup> Hinkle.

Katherine planting bulbs in her garden in the last autumn of her life. He wrote, “There was something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance ... the small hunched-over figure, her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies in dying October, calmly plotting the resurrection.”<sup>6</sup>

Katherine White was one of those souls who plants seeds of hope under dark skies of grief or oppression, one of those who goes about their living and dying until — no one knows when or how or where — God will bring his creation to full bloom and all the seeds of hope will blossom into a splendiferous beauty of which the human heart can now only dream. To have faith in this is to see the invisible, to see Jesus, to see the presence of God in all of life.

### Conclusion

I’ve called this sermon “Giving To See” and we’re going to talk about giving for these Sundays of our stewardship season. You may wonder what all of this has to do with giving. It has to do with Bartimaeus’ example. He responded to Jesus by tossing away his cloak. A beggar’s cloak was not only the one thing that protected him from the elements. It was also commonly spread out on the ground to receive donations.<sup>7</sup> By tossing his cloak aside Bartimaeus gave up his only means of making it. How scary was that? And that’s the real miracle. He had faith in what he couldn’t see and he gave his life to it.

Fred Craddock, for more than thirty years of the greatest preachers in America, tells the story of teaching one summer at Princeton Seminary. In the refectory, he found a place at a table where a young woman was already seated.

“You a student?” he asked.

“Yes, I’m a graduate student,” she replied, “in the field of Theology.”

So they talked some more. She was a Roman Catholic nun — she had not been one for very long — and she told how she used to be a buyer for Macy’s in New York City. She had a nice apartment and everything was just really going her way. In fact, she was engaged to be married.

About two months before the wedding, she had prayed and thought and prayed and thought. She called her fiancé. He came over and she gave him back the ring. He didn’t understand, but he took the ring and left.

She said, “Some time later, I was on the subway in New York. I was wearing my nun’s habit, and all the seats were taken. I was standing, holding the strap when I suddenly realized, facing me, holding the strap, right in front of me, was he. I said, ‘Hello.’ He said, ‘Hello.’ We both cried and said goodbye again.”

Dr. Craddock asked, “Does it still hurt?”

And she said, “Very much.”

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<sup>6</sup> The Pastor’s Story File, 4.11.3.

<sup>7</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991) 253.

“Then why did you do it?”

She did it, Fred Craddock discovered, because not everybody lives by the principle, “If it feels good, do it.”<sup>8</sup>

The real miracle is always the miracle of faith, that people will give their lives to God, whom they cannot see, and God’s way, which is not the way the world works.

By the miracle of faith poor Bartimaeus saw and gave his life to Jesus. By the miracle of faith we can also see and give.

It is this miracle of faith that caused an ancient church leader to exclaim about this text: “‘All hail, O light!’ For upon us buried in darkness, imprisoned in the shadow of death, a heavenly light has shone, a light of a clarity surpassing the sun’s, and of a sweetness exceeding any this earthly life can offer.”<sup>9</sup>

“‘I see,’ said the blind man, who couldn’t see at all.” May it be so with us.

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<sup>8</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, Mike Graves and Richard F. Ward, eds., (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001) 90.

<sup>9</sup> Clement of Alexandria, an enormously influential theologian in the early church (c. 160 - c. 213) wrote of this text in his *Exhortations to the Greeks*: “The commandment of the Lord shines clearly, enlightening the eyes. Receive Christ, receive power to see, receive your light, that you may plainly recognize both God and man. More delightful than gold and precious stones, more desirable than honey and the honeycomb is the Word that has enlightened us. How could he not be desirable, who illumined minds buried in darkness, and endowed with clear vision ‘the light-bearing eyes’ of the soul? ... Sing his praises, then, Lord, and make known to me your Father, who is God. Your Word will save me, your song instruct me. I have gone astray in my search for God; but now that you light my path, Lord, I find God through you, and receive the Father from you, I become co-heir with you, since you were not ashamed to own me as your brother. Let us, then, shake off forgetfulness of truth, shake off the mist of ignorance and darkness that dims our eyes, and contemplate the true God, after first raising this song of praise to him: ‘All hail, O light!’ For upon us buried in darkness, imprisoned in the shadow of death, a heavenly light has shone, a light of a clarity surpassing the sun’s, and of a sweetness exceeding any this earthly life can offer.” Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds., “Mark,” *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament, vol. II (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 153.