

Mark 10:46-52

Oct. 24, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I like gospel readings like the one we have for today. They are perfect for engaging with a text on a spiritual level by putting ourselves into the story.

So, who are you in this reading about blind Bartimaeus? With which character to you most identify?

Are you Bartimaeus boldly calling out to Jesus for healing, because you know that only he can heal you and make you whole?

What is it that you want Jesus to do for you? Do you recognize what needs to be healed?

Are you willing to boldly shout out to Jesus for help, risking ridicule from the crowd?

And, who is Jesus for you? By what name do you call him?

Bartimaeus calls Jesus “son of David,” identifying him with King David and as God’s true heir to the throne of Israel, which was a super dangerous thing to do with the Romans standing around.

The Romans kept peace by squashing anyone who would want to be a king, and anyone who might be willing to follow another king aside from the emperor. That’s the pax Romana, the peace of Rome.

And if we remember that Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua, and Joshua fought the battle of Jericho bringing down the walls of the city and destroying it, we can see how Bartimaeus calling Jesus, aka Joshua, “Son of David,” can be an even more offensive statement for Rome than we notice at first glance. Them’s fighten’ words!

Or, maybe it was a proclamation of hope from Bartimaeus for everyone who was near him. Perhaps Bartimaeus thinks Jesus will destroy the walls of Rome like Joshua did, and bring an end to their oppression.

Either way, it was a truly risky, stupid, or bold move on his part as he sits there outside the city of Jericho.

Maybe it was the Holy Spirit who moved him.

But, we have to wonder, is Bartimaeus asking Jesus to not only heal him, but to bring healing to all of Israel by tearing down the walls of Roman oppression?

Or, perhaps Bartimaeus is merely asking Jesus to show him God's Kingdom then and there in order to restore his vision of hope.

So, are you Bartimaeus, full of faith ready to be healed? Or, are you Timaeus the father of the blind man?

Are you worried about your child? Have you come to the end of your rope and left them to sit on the corner begging, because you just can't take care of them? Have the injustices of the government caused you to have to leave your child to fend for themselves?

We don't really know anything about Timaeus except that his name means "honor," and that a Timaeus was a key character in one of Plato's writings about the formation of the universe.

In Plato's story, which is narrated by Timaeus, the universe was created by a divine craftsman who brought order out of chaos, so that it would produce a vast array of good effects, constructing a world that is as excellent as nature will permit. When people realize this, they are returned to their original state of excellence, which was lost in their embodiment.

So, to clarify, for Plato, the body is bad and the soul is trying to escape it, which is the total opposite of Jewish and Christian understanding. For us of the Abrahamic faiths, creation is good. That's what it says in Genesis 1, and on top of it all, Jesus takes on creation in the incarnation.

So, what is Mark saying by telling us that Timaeus has a blind son whose name means "unclean," and that Jesus is the only one who can bring the son of rationality sight?

Pretty much we are being told what the entire Bible says, God is in ultimate control over everything, God alone can turn evil to good, and God's ways are not our ways.

That's the embodiment of Jesus' death and resurrection.

So, just as Bartimaeus went from being blind to being able to see clearly, Rome, and all forms of oppression, will be defeated by God.

Once Bartimaeus sees that clearly, he then follows Jesus on the way.

It's not rational. It's faith. Churches and hospitals are called Sacred Heart, not sacred mind, after all. It's about compassion, not reasoning.

So, are you Timaeus, coming to the realization that rationality only gets you so far?

Or, are you one of the many who tells Bartimaeus to be quiet? Don't stir the pot! Don't draw attention to us! Be quiet before you get us all killed, which was also pretty rational.

But, it isn't the crowd who gets killed. It is Jesus who is killed and resurrected, who brings us all, including the crowd, eternal life, and so Jesus doesn't let the fear of the crowd prevent Bartimaeus' healing. Jesus calls Bartimaeus through the crowd to come to him and receive healing.

It's like Moses parting the Red Sea making it easy for Bartimaeus to be healed. The people with their fear were stumbling blocks for Bartimaeus, but Jesus clears the way for him.

Does your fear ever make you a stumbling block for other people's healing? The Greek word for devil, diabolos, has to do with causing others to stumble by throwing things into their path, like Legos or doubt.

Perhaps all of us are the devil, the crowd filled with fear causing others to stumble, from time to time. But, that's why we have been gifted with the rite of confession and forgiveness.

God knows we fear and God forgives the sin that comes from our fear, strengthening us to be bold in the world like Bartimaeus.

So, are you the crowd filled with fear? Or, are you one of the disciples who calls Bartimaeus forth to come to Jesus?

Notice how they use one of the senses that Bartimaeus has. They didn't wave him forward, because he couldn't see, so they call him forward. They call him to come, because Jesus has told them to call him forward.

The disciples listen and they act according to Jesus' will.

And if you recall back to Genesis 1 – God calls forth creation.

And you'll notice that the disciples say, "Take heart," to Bartimaeus. They are celebrating with the man and are basically saying, "Peace be with you." Peace be with you. Take heart. Jesus will heal you.

And after his healing, Bartimaeus doesn't go away, he goes with. He goes with Jesus and the disciples, becoming a disciple himself.

Those who see more clearly invite those who cannot see at all to come and be healed by Jesus, to hear the good news and have their eyes opened to God's amazing grace, only then can they join the way – the way of peace for the whole world.

So, who are you in today's Gospel reading? Are you Bartimaeus, Timaeus his dad, the crowd filled with fear, or the disciples following God's will for the healing of others?

Perhaps we are all of these characters to some degree.

So, what needs healing in your life right now? Is it your own healing or the healing of someone else?

What thoughts and feelings are stirred up as you contemplate the characters in today's reading?

Unlike Plato, we believe that the body is important and that the body can tell us things that the mind totally misses, because it's too busy rationalizing.

So, what is your body telling you? What are you blind to? What are you hearing? What makes your stomach turn and causes you to throw up a little into your mouth? What is breaking your heart?

Check your jaw and see when it's clenched. Check your hands and see when they are fisted. And then ask yourself, what is the source of those feelings?

Those are the things we take to Jesus, because he can heal them in us so that we can go out into the world to bring God's peace into those situation that caused us grief in the first place.

Rationalizing allows for all sorts of evil to live in this world, evil that compassion will not let stand. So, when we confess our sin, it is usually that our rationalizing has allowed us to be a part of oppression, instead of fighting against it. Often it is sin that we don't even recognize – those unknown sins.

But, faith enables us to boldly call out to God for healing from our blindness – for ourselves and for the world – and faith also enables us to be a part of the healing in the world, because with the Holy Spirit, we are Jesus' hands, feet, and voice here and now.

We are the embodiment of Jesus' death into resurrection, God's compassion for the world, which isn't rational at all. It's pure faithfulness.

So, we continue on the way, putting one foot in front of the other, because we have not yet reached our ultimate destination. We are simply on the way to the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

So, we go in peace and we follow Jesus into the unknown. He is our light that enables us to see God's truth in the world.

God is love.

Thanks be to God. Amen.