

SERMON

Throw Off. Leap Up. Follow Him.

Dear God,

We thank you for Your Word and that it is still alive to and for us yet today. Thank you for the great treasures You offer to us every time we read or hear Your Word proclaimed – the treasures that are peace and love, joy, grace and forgiveness, hope. Please bless now the words of my mouth and the meditations of each heart. In Your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from our God who heals blindness and who inspires us to throw off, to leap up, and to follow Jesus. Amen.

A couple of years ago I needed to have cataract surgery. I tried to assure the optometrist who referred me that I was much too young, but she wasn't having it. The next thing you know, I'm in for surgery.

When I came out, my terrible nearsightedness – which I'd lived with my entire life – was gone. I could see without glasses or contacts. Now, for someone who has worn glasses since I was 5, THIS was, and still is, a miracle! Honestly, I still can't get over it. I wake up in the morning, and when I open my eyes, I can see clear across the room! I regularly thank God for this marvel of modern medicine. I am thankful that God has worked a miracle for me through the trained hands, willing hearts, and attentive care of my doctor and the surgical team that restored my sight. Maybe you don't think that's a miracle. I say maybe you need to give it some more thought. A few decades ago, this wasn't possible. Though I need to wear readers most of the time to read, it remains a miracle of restored vision.

I tell you this because today's Gospel from Mark is a story of Jesus healing blindness. In fact it's Mark's second story of Jesus healing someone who is blind. Now pay attention here. It's important.

THREE times between the first healing and this one, Jesus has explained to the disciples that he will suffer and die. THREE times, the disciples do not get it. They are, you might say, blinded to it. Instead they bicker about greatness and who's the best. Last week we even heard about James and John asking to sit at Jesus' right and left hands. If you don't think this is human nature and something all of us do on occasion, just open up a social media platform! Check out how great we all are!!

Now please don't hear me saying that everyone on social media is just there to boast or brag. It is a great way to stay connected and share our lives with our friends and family. We are recording worship right now to share with those who can't be here with us. This, too, is amazing and miraculous. It is just that we need to be aware of the insidious effects social media postings can have on others and even on ourselves. We can't live our lives there. It's important to re-evaluate, reassess, and maybe even reform parts of our social media presence on a regular basis so it doesn't end up controlling how we live our lives – or maybe even how we don't actually live our lives.

Because, you see, Jesus knew then, and knows today, that humble brags and tooting our own horns will happen on occasion, can even become a habit, and that they invariably will leave us flat and empty. These do not sustain us for the journey that is life. These do not bring about true connection and long-standing joy. Jesus tries to tell disciples – and all of us today – that it is service to and love for one another that truly make us great.

One of my heroes, David Lose, writes: *Jesus points out that there is no escaping service. You will either willingly, even joyfully, serve others, or you will become a slave to your illusions that you can be free and secure your future through status and power (or, in our day, wealth or youth or fame or possessions, and so on.)* Please LORD God, give us eyes to see and ears to hear this great truth.

Jesus spent his entire ministry in service to others. In fact, he gave his very life in service to others. In today's lesson, we come upon a man named Bartimaeus who

is blind and begging beside the road on the outskirts of Jericho. When he hears that it is **JESUS** who is passing by in the midst of a large crowd, he starts crying out to him. “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” The crowd tries to shush him – but he will not be quieted. He cries out even louder and more desperately than before. Bartimaeus truly SEES Jesus and who Jesus is – in spite of his blindness. And this time Jesus stops. When Bartimaeus is invited to come to Jesus, he throws aside his cloak, leaps up, and goes to him. When asked what he wants, he tells Jesus he wants to regain his sight. Jesus heals him, telling him that his faith has made him well. Without looking back, Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way.

I believe we can learn a few things from Bartimaeus.

1. He knew that he was blind and had lost his vision.

Are there things we are not seeing due to our position or status, economic, ethnic, or religious traditions and habits? Have we even recognized that we might be blinded in these ways?? Have we been misled into following – maybe even worshiping – the wrong people or things? Do we see all people as people?

2. Bartimaeus recognized that he needed help.

Do you need help? Have you lost your vision or your hope? Do you feel sometimes like you’re just sitting alongside the road? It’s ok to need help. We all do, every single one of us at one time or another. Some people need more help than others. That is just the way it is.

3. Bartimaeus asked for the help he needed.

Are you afraid to ask for help? Are you fooled by belief in self-sufficiency? There are many people and places where we can ask for help, starting with God. Prayer is powerful! We have a dedicated prayer chain here who will pray regularly for you. Send an email to the church office or call in with your request. You can ask Carolyn, Pastor Ted, or me, and we will do everything we can to help with your situation. Our whole congregation is filled with people who can help. Everyone has someone in their life they can trust. See them. Don’t be afraid to ask for help!

4. Bartimaeus didn't give up when presented with obstacles.

Who knows how long he was sitting by the side of the road? Years? Decades? We don’t know who may have encouraged him, or how he held onto hope, but he did. We are invited to hold onto his example. Bartimaeus knew what he knew,

and he knew that Jesus cared. He recognized that the crowd – though large in number – didn't have to be obeyed. Fake news, anyone?

5. Bartimaeus threw off what was between him and Jesus.

Unlike the rich young man mentioned a few verses earlier, who was unable to let go of his wealth, Bartimaeus literally threw off what was probably his only wealth. His cloak that kept him from the cold and that he used to collect coins when he begged was thrown aside in order for him to leap up to get to Jesus. What is between you and Jesus? We must each find a way to throw it off or let it go. Scripture tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil. I'd guess that love of power or control runs a close 2nd and 3rd. Throw that off already!

6. Bartimaeus had the courage to name what he needed and when healed, chose to follow Jesus on the way.

The Bible is filled with God's Word to us. One of the most common sayings from God and God's messengers is "Don't be afraid." Take heart and go to God. It's not too late, and there is absolutely nothing God won't listen to or can't forgive. God is for You. God is for Me. Like Bartimaeus, we can tell Jesus our need, and Jesus will bring healing. It doesn't always look exactly the way we expect, but it comes if we can keep our eyes open to it. Rather than focusing solely on himself and celebrating only his own healing. Bartimaeus chose to stay close to Jesus and to follow Him. How about you and I do the same?

AMEN.