

## Can I See? Mark 10:46-52

October 11, 2009

Today our Gospel lesson finds Jesus and his followers on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. On the side of the road is a blind man. This blind man believes that Jesus can restore his sight. He's correct in that assumption of course. Jesus takes the initiative by asking the first question: "What do you want me to do for you?" The man's answer is, "Rabbi, I want to see!"

As we think about this encounter with Jesus, a question may pop into your mind. "I can already see, can't I? Do I really need to ask Jesus to help me see?" That depends. There is sight, and there is insight. Whether or not you and I can see physically, what we really need is the gift of spiritual sight – or insight. So let's watch and listen and think. All that Jesus does he does in order to seek and save the lost – and that's us. Lost, but found – found in our Lord Jesus Christ and thus safe and secure forever.

In this story there's more than meets the eye. More than vision is needed to see and understand what is happening here. What we need is insight. The question that serves as the theme for the message today is just as applicable to you and me as it was to Bartimaeus. Can I see? Well, I don't know. Can you? Are things clear to you? To me? Do we have the insight necessary to apply the lessons of our text to our own personal lives? Let's see what we can see!

We know very little about Bartimaeus. His father's name must have been Timaeus because Bartimaeus means "son of Timaeus." We can guess that he lived in Jericho, since he was sitting on a roadside near that city. But other than that and the fact that he was blind, we don't have any more information about him in the Bible. We don't know his age, how long he had been blind, what caused his blindness, if he was born blind. We don't know anything else about his family or friends.

But, oh, what a man he is! A man of insight indeed. He reveals much to us. He helps us see things clearly. And we thank God for a man like Bartimaeus who is an inspiring example for us. He may have been blind but he certainly had a lot of insight.

It's been said that people who are lacking or deficient in one of the five senses often gain strength in the others. There's no doubt that Bartimaeus, who was blind and could not see at all, had tremendous hearing. I imagine that as he sat on that roadside day after day, he listened to the conversations of those who walked by. He heard the sound of camels, the shouts of children, the chatter of women, the talk of travelers as they passed down the road. No doubt, he picked up bits and pieces of information as people walked this main thoroughfare from all parts of the land.

Obviously Bartimaeus had heard a lot of talk about Jesus. He knew quite a bit about this Jesus from Nazareth. He heard many stories about Jesus and the miracles he performed. He had heard the reports that Jesus had the power to cast out demons, to heal people of their diseases and infirmities, and even to raise the dead. He knew that Jesus was from the house and lineage of David. Notice how he addresses Jesus two times as "Son of David." He knew from the sacred OT Scriptures that a Son from David's line would ascend his throne and reign forever. This new king would usher in a time of mercy and grace unlike any that had come before. He would defeat sin and the grave and establish an everlasting kingdom.

And now Bartimaeus hears that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, the promised Messiah, is coming down the road. What an opportunity! He begins to shout at the top of his lungs, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

When those around him try to silence him, he cries out even more loudly than before. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" His determination had to come from a conviction borne of faith - This One can help me! I know it! The words that the risen Lord will speak to Thomas sometime later come to mind here. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn. 20:29).

When our Lord Jesus hear the cries of Bartimaeus, he does something unexpected by the crowd (but anticipated by those who know Jesus). He stops. This act of stopping for Bartimaeus is a tender act of mercy. The Son of David, a king like no other king, Jesus, the very Son of God, stops for the sake of a blind beggar. And then he commands, "Call him."

When the crowd that at first tried to quiet Bartimaeus sees that Jesus is calling, they cheer him on. "Hey, cheer up. On your feet. He's calling you." Bartimaeus jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. Jesus asks the question, "What do you want me to do for you?" We can hear in that question a touch of gentle humor and good will. The question is asked so that the blind man can give his answer before all the world and for generations to come. Jesus gives him the opportunity to confess his faith, the faith shared by all Christians of all times past and present. "Rabbi, I want to see."

Our Lord Jesus answers that request with an action word and a declaration that reveals Jesus did indeed have time for Bartimaeus. The Lord knew his deepest yearning: "Go! Your faith has made you well."

It's really no surprise that the words that come from the mouth of Jesus, the Word made flesh, actually bring about what they say. As in the beginning when God said, "Let there be light" and there was light. So now the same God issued a command and the once blind man can now see. A miracle! Bartimaeus can see and he immediately follows Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.

It's more than a coincidence that this miracle of sight takes place as Jesus is heading toward Jerusalem for the last time before his crucifixion and resurrection. A casual look at the events recorded in Mark 10 reveals that it was hard for the people to see and understand the reason for it all. In Mark 10:2-12 the Pharisees insisted that a legalistic keeping of all the rules was necessary for salvation. In verses 17-30 Jesus called his disciples to a life of total devotion to him and to the heavenly Father. Some, however, would always be distracted by a love of money and material things. In verses 35-45 Jesus tells us that the Christian life is all about giving ourselves in service to others. And yet the disciples wanted to claim for themselves positions of honor and glory on this earth and in the kingdom to come.

Because we are all children of Adam and Eve we have inherited from them a human nature corrupted by sin. We all sin. We all fall short. We all need help. We all desperately need not just sight but insight. And the tender story of Bartimaeus stands forever before us as a call to something that is far greater than just eyesight.

So often we are like those proud Pharisees and think that we're on God's team, that we are members of the kingdom, that we're saved because of our Law keeping. I've gone to church for all these years. I've served. I put my money in the offering basket. Doesn't that count for something Lord? We strive for our own brand of righteousness rather than the righteousness of Christ that is given to us as a gift. Like the Twelve we fight over the right to be the greatest in the kingdom instead of being grateful for even the lowest place in the kingdom.

Like Bartimaeus we need to cry out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us." It's not just Bartimaeus who is in need today, it is us. Lord have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord, can I see? Will you give to me the gift of spiritual sight so I can look to you and see the Son of God who would save me from my spiritual blindness? Can I see Lord?

Salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. There's no other Savior. There's no other way to eternal life. We need to look to Jesus and see in Him our Savior from sin and our hope of heaven. Our human nature says – There's got to be something more to this. It's too simple; too easy. There must be something I can do. I want to earn this, to grab it for myself. But Scripture says, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, not by works, so that no one can boast" It's a gift. (Ephesians 2). In Jesus, believing in Him, trusting that his death on the cross paid for our sins in full, we have everything we need for eternal life. We go from death to life, from darkness to light, from being blinded by sin to being able to see and experience God's love and grace and forgiveness forever.

John the Baptist wondered if Jesus was really the Messiah, the Savior of the world. He sent His disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus pointed John to the evidence from the prophet Isaiah, who had spoken about the day when the Messiah would appear on earth. Isaiah said that in that day the blind will receive their sight, the lame will walk, the lepers will be cleansed, the deaf will hear, the dead will be raised, and the poor will have the Good News preached to them (Isaiah 29, 35, 42).

The lesson in this text is to put our faith and hope in Jesus for spiritual sight, eternal salvation. Some look at a Bible story like this and think – if I put my trust in Jesus, he should heal me just like he healed Bartimaeus. Certainly God can heal. He has the power to do it. However, trusting in Jesus, putting your life in his hands, is no guarantee that he will heal all your diseases and remove all your troubles. Being a Christian does not mean you'll never get sick, that you'll never have problems. Being a Christian means relying on God's strength and God's help to get you through each day. The answer God gives to us in times of affliction and pain is often the same answer God gave to St. Paul when he asked God to remove the thorn from his flesh. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Sometimes God can work powerfully in us and through us despite our weaknesses.

A few years back, Jim Stovall decided to become a stock broker. Even though he is blind, Jim has a determination and commitment to hard work that has helped him to transcend his disability. Jim also has a wife, Crystal, who supports and encourages him in everything he does. Jim and Crystal studied hard to get through the broker exams, then went through training sessions together. Most of the other students in the training sessions were better educated and better trained than Jim. They had no handicap to hold them back. And Jim knew that he would have to work extra hard to compete with these men.

In one of the training sessions, a teacher insisted that each broker needed to make one hundred telephone calls a day in order to drum up business. Jim and Crystal decided that, in order to succeed, they would make two hundred calls a day. For sixteen hours a day, Jim and Crystal worked like dogs to get people's business. They worked to the point of exhaustion to get their two hundred calls a day.

After six months, the brokerage put out a report ranking all the brokers in the training classes and how much they had made in that six-month period. Jim Stovall was ranked number one in his class. None of the other brokers made anywhere near the money he had. It was almost embarrassing. Jim called up his instructor and asked how it was possible that the others weren't seeing the success he was. The instructor laughed, amazed that Jim hadn't figured it out. He explained that he always exhorted the stockbrokers in his training sessions to make one hundred phone calls a day in the hopes that they would at least make ten a day. Jim was the only one who had taken the instructor seriously. And he had made two hundred calls a day. So he was, in essence, working twenty times harder than the other guys.

I thought of Jim Stovall as I read the story of Bartimaeus. Some people are defeated when life throws them a bad break. They crumble when their dreams don't work out. They fold when they draw a few bad cards. They moan and they groan and they make everyone around them miserable just because they suffer a few minor disappointments. What if you had lost your sight like Jim Stovall or were born blind like Bartimaeus?

In times of weakness and suffering and in times of health and prosperity we give honor and glory and praise to our God. He has blessed us so richly, he has saved us by the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, he has given us spiritual sight (more important than physical sight) so that we might see Jesus as our Savior and Lord and live in his kingdom forever. Amen.