

Mark 10:46 – end



We often hear this story and think of blindness and seeing in their outward forms but as with most of Jesus' teachings he is leading us to a deeper truth – a story not to take just literally. I think this story is bigger than outward and physical blindness or seeing. I think it's a universal story that every one of

us experiences even if our vision is 20/20. So let me ask you a few questions.

Darkness

Do you ever feel like you are in the dark? I don't mean that someone turned off the lights around you, but that the light within you is no longer shining. I'm talking about those times when you feel lost and you can't see a way forward. You're confused. There's no clarity. Maybe the answers and beliefs that once lit your way no longer illuminate. You stumble and fumble your way through life not sure of where you are going.

Or maybe it's the darkness of fear. Maybe grief, loss, and sorrow have darkened your life. Maybe shadows from your past – shadows of guilt, regret, failure, disappointment – mimic your every move

and no matter how fast you run the shadow is still there.

I wonder if that's what it was like for Bartimaeus.

Sitting on the Roadside

Do you ever feel like you are sitting on the roadside of life? Do you ever feel like everyone except you has it figured out and is going somewhere? I'm talking about those times when it feels like life is passing us by and we aren't getting anywhere. We feel stuck, more like a spectator of life than a participant.

Maybe it's about exhaustion or a lack of wholeheartedness. Maybe its despair, inertia, indifference. Maybe it feels like you don't have any place to be and no one to miss you if you're not there. Maybe you've been sidelined by loneliness,

being the outsider, or offering a voice others don't want to hear.

I wonder if that's what it was like for Bartimaeus.

Begging

Do you ever feel like you are begging for your life? I'm talking about those times when you feel depleted, the well has run dry, and you have nothing in reserve. It's those times when life overwhelms us and we wonder how or if we'll get by. We're desperate and our prayer is begging and pleading to just get through another day. It's not just that we don't have enough, we start wondering if we are enough.

I wonder if that's what it was like for Bartimaeus.

I remember times like that in my life and I'll bet you do too.

There was a time in my life when I was lost. Confused. Overwhelmed. I did not feel enough, I didn't feel like I fit in or had anything worthwhile to contribute. Without turning this into a therapy session it stemmed from my childhood – of not being heard or listened to. It came from a place of feeling disconnected through my parents' divorce where I became a chameleon and just tried to say and do the right thing not to be nuisance.

This manifested itself into my adult life where I reached rock bottom in November 2010 and I gave up trying to make sense of my life and handed my will and life over to God.; I wasn't happy and thought he might do a better job of my life than me!

I hit my knees and surrendered.

When have you sat in the darkness begging? When has blindness been your experience of life? When have you been sidelined? When have begging and pleading been the only prayer you had?

When have you been Bartimaeus? What happened? And what have you done with that experience? Or better yet, what has it done with you?

As much as I disliked and wanted to avoid those times of sitting in my darkness and begging they would change my life in ways that I could not foresee at the time. They changed how I see God, the world, myself, and others. And I can't help but wonder if those times are a necessary part of our spiritual journey. Maybe they are ways in which we mature and come to ourselves. Maybe they are a

gateway to the fullness of life. I am not suggesting that God intends or causes those times. I don't believe that. I am suggesting that God does not waste them, that God wastes nothing of our lives – not our blindness, not our roadside sitting, and not our begging.

Two Kinds of Seeing

Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus says, “My teacher, let me see again.” Did you catch what he said? Bartimaeus wants to see “again” meaning that at one point in his life he had vision. There was a time when he could see.

So, what if we were to see Bartimaeus' life in three stages? First, Bartimaeus can see. Second, he is blind, sitting on the roadside, and begging. Third,

he regains his sight. He did not, however, regain the sight he originally had. It was a different way of seeing.

Sometimes words challenge us to see more than we think is there. The same word can have more than one meaning, and so it is with today's gospel. We're told that Bartimaeus wanted "to see again" and that "he regained his sight." So we could say that he got back what he once had. That's one way of seeing this text. But those same words can also mean that Bartimaeus wanted "to look up" and that "he looked upwards." And that's another way of seeing this text.

Regaining sight and looking upwards. What if both kind of seeings are necessary? What if Bartimaeus

sees again but in a new way? He now looks upward. He has a higher vision and a greater consciousness.

Isn't that the pattern of spiritual growth we see in the scriptures? Richard Rohr describes it as order, disorder, and reorder. My guess is that every one of us has lived that pattern. Isn't that what happened to Bartimaeus? Isn't that what happened to the Israelites? They went from Egypt, to the wilderness, to the promised land. Each of those patterns is a story of life, death, and resurrection.

The thing about sitting in our darkness and begging is that at the time we can never see what is coming to us. I don't think blind Bartimaeus could see what or who was coming his way that day he sat on the roadside begging. The most he could do was to be

faithful to his darkness, to not run away, but to cry out in hope. And maybe that's true for you and me.

We sit in our darkness begging and then one day something begins to come into focus. Things start to look different. We catch a glimpse of a new life. We have an insight about ourselves. We begin to see things in a new light. I don't know how that happens. I only know that it does happen, even if it takes years.

In my darkness, at the time, I could not see a way out, a way forward. But gradually the lights came on and I now have a greater understanding of the purpose of my life. 14 years ago I would have thought you completely mad if you had described my life now to me. I could never have envisaged me doing this, it was never my plan!

And I have to pinch myself every day. I am filled with gratitude and joy.

That's what sitting in darkness and begging has done for me. It continues to open my eyes. It continues to show me new paths for my life. It continues to help me see things in a new light.

What about you? What have you learned about yourself from sitting in the darkness and begging? What are you seeing anew or maybe for the first time? In what ways is your seeing changing?

What if changing our lives and our world begins with changing how we see?

Let us pray.

Lord, we know you are with us – always – through the joys and the pains. Help us to hold on to you, to

trust you. Give us patience, resilience and perseverance and reveal your light in our lives.

For your glory we pray.

Amen.