

“Restored Sight”

Mark 10: 46-52

This week we return to the Gospels for our lesson today, specifically the Gospel of Mark. In our text today, we hear about Bartimaeus who is a blind beggar that Jesus heals. There really isn't anything unusual about this story. It holds a lot of the same elements as other healing stories do in the Gospel of Mark.

Like the other stories, we hear about someone who needs healing. We hear about Jesus seeing this person or hearing this person calling out his name. Like all the other healing stories, we hear about Jesus healing this person. There really isn't anything unusual about the story of Bartimaeus.

So why did Mark think he needed to add one more story to this Gospel? Was he needing 1000 words to complete his assignment and without this story of Bartimaeus he was only at 700 words? What is the reason behind adding just one more healing story? Like any good writer, maybe Mark should have learned when enough is enough.

Well, to help us understand the reason why there is just one more healing story in this Gospel, first we need to understand that for Mark the focus of this healing is not Jesus. The focus of this healing is Bartimaeus. I know this sounds

crazy. As people of faith, we turn to the Gospels to learn more about Jesus and now the preacher is telling us this story is not about Jesus but about some blind beggar.

Well, yes. Sometimes in turning to the stories of faith, we put on blinders and we forget that that the transformative power of Jesus was not just found in who he was as the Son of God. It was also found and experienced in the people he interacted with, broke bread with, talked with and yes even healed. Jesus was more than just power to calm the storms. He could and did see everyone as a child of God. And for us as people of faith, that is what makes all the difference.

Let me explain: As I said before, there really is not much that is different about this healing story. As I said before, it has all the same elements as many other stories in the Gospel of Mark. If there is something that sets this story apart and calls for us to pay attention, it would be found in the actual act of the healing itself.

Usually in the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus heals someone, the healing is done in private with no chance of anyone finding out about it. And then when the healing is complete, Jesus tells the person, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen. Don’t tell anyone about what happened here!”

Which usually didn't happen because one of the first things people did after being healed by Jesus was go and tell everyone they met. And who could blame them? Just imagine after being healed from a disease that plagued you for years, after being healed from a disorder that kept you from your family and friends...Just imagine after being healed from an illness that because it, you had been pushed to the margins and ignored for years, now finally you were healed, what's the first thing you would do?

We all know that when it comes to really good news, none of us can wait to share it with everyone we met. Just look at social media. Facebook and Twitter are filled each and every day with people telling everything about their day. Whether it is what they ate for breakfast that morning or what milestone they just achieved, people share good news. And no matter how small that news may be, we can't wait to make it Facebook official. Can you just imagine what your social media's newsfeed would look like if you had just been given back your life because now you are healed? Everyone's phones and computer screens would be dinging, tweeting, whistling or binging so much that you might just start to wonder if you were trending that day.

Good news cannot be silenced! It was great that Jesus thought to ask people to keep quiet about him being the Son of God and all, to keep quiet about

experiencing the Kingdom of God in their midst but that was never going to happen. Good News cannot be silenced!

So ironically enough, Jesus doesn't ask Bartimaeus to be silent after he heals him. Jesus never tells Bartimaeus to be quiet or to not tell anyone what happened here today. In fact, Jesus does the complete opposite. Jesus lifts Bartimaeus from the midst of the crowd, brings him center stage where everyone can see what is going on, and then he heals Bartimaeus. No commands. No requests. No admonitions to keep quiet. The good news cannot and will not be silenced. And that is what sets this healing apart.

The healing is not done behind doors where no one can see it happening. It is out in the open for all the world to see. We may find ourselves asking, "Why would Jesus tell others to be quiet and not Bartimaeus? Well, as they say, Timing is everything.

This is Jesus' last miracle before he triumphantly enters into Jerusalem. In the very next chapter, Jesus will be riding in on a donkey, surrounded by the crowd, shouting Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the Name of the Lord. Jesus will be going through the gates of Jerusalem while the crowd surrounds him and celebrates the coming of the Kingdom of God. As soon as Jesus enters the gates, things will be different. The mighty will fall. The people will be restored. At

least that is what the crowd expects. Or should I say, that is what the crowd wanted or hoped would happen.

But that is not what happens. In Jerusalem, Jesus enters the gates. He rides around for a little bit, takes a look around, and then leaves. Jesus leaves without doing really anything. The crowd is so disappointed. Where is the Kingdom of God? They missed it.

That's right. They missed it. The crowds missed what was right in front of their faces because they could not see. They were blind and could not see that the Kingdom of God was right there in their midst. The Kingdom of God didn't come when Jesus entered the gates of Jerusalem. The Kingdom of God was already there in their midst as Jesus healed Bartimaeus and restored his sight.

You see, Jesus didn't need the triumphant ride or the shouts from the crowd to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God. It had already been announced. The coming of the Kingdom of God had already been announced through the act of Jesus healing Bartimaeus, when he restored Bartimaeus to life. The Kingdom of God had already been announced through Bartimaeus' cries for mercy. It had already been announced through Bartimaeus' cries for hope. It had already been announced through Bartimaeus' cries for someone to stop and see him as a child of God.

Here's why I say this: Jesus had been telling his disciples along that the Kingdom of God was coming. He had told them all along that the Kingdom of God was there. Jesus had told them all along that the Kingdom of God was not a kingdom of privileges or riches. Rather it was a kingdom where the blind would see, the deaf would hear, the lame would walk and the outsider would be welcomed. And that is exactly what happened. The Kingdom of God came and no one noticed. Well, almost no one noticed. Bartimaeus noticed and his life was transformed.

The Kingdom of God was there in the crowd's midst and they missed it, all because it came in the form of a blind beggar no one noticed, a blind beggar no one cared about. The Kingdom of God came in the form of a blind beggar whom the crowd had tried to silence.

After all, Bartimaeus was an outsider, pushed to the margins and had nothing really to offer. His cries for help annoyed the crowd. His cries for recognition disturbed their peace and quiet. Bartimaeus' cries for mercy disrupted the status quo. The crowd tried to silence Bartimaeus because his very presence confronted them with all the times God's justice and compassion had not been shared. So it was decided that the best course of action was to ignore him. It is better to keep him quiet. Best to keep him in his place. Best to pretend he doesn't exist. After all, to the crowd's way of thinking, the Kingdom of God only cares

about the insiders, right? Everyone knew the Kingdom of God would come in pomp and circumstance.

But it didn't. It came that day in the form of a blind beggar no one could see, a blind beggar whose cries they ignored, a blind beggar they pretended didn't exist. The Kingdom of God was right there in their midst and they missed it.

all because it came in the form of a blind beggar whose cries annoyed them so they tried to silence him.

Thankfully, Bartimaeus would not keep quiet. He kept shouting. He kept pleading. He kept calling out to Jesus for mercy! And because he did, Bartimaeus was healed.

Following the healing, Jesus tells Bartimaeus that it is his faith that made him well. Bartimaeus recognizes that "faith is not right belief nor a pious resignation to inscrutable providence... [Faith] is demonstrated as the refusal to be silenced, as the refusal to wait for a better time, as the refusal to wait for an appointment. It is the rude insistence that the calamity be attended to now."

Bartimaeus' cries are still ringing in our world today. They are echoed in people's cries for justice, in people's cries for compassion. They are echoed in people's cries for honesty and truth.

And just like the crowd, we have a choice. We can let these cries annoy us and pretend they don't exist. Or we can look with the eyes of the Kingdom of God and see...see that there are people who need mercy, see that there are people who are hurting. We can look with around with eyes of the Kingdom of God and see that there are people right here in our midst who are crying out just to be seen as a child of God.

A few weeks ago, I was watching a news cast and they were doing an interview with Richard Gere. He has a new movie coming out where he plays a homeless man living on the streets of New York City. Nothing unusual about this story line except that it wasn't a big production Hollywood type of movie.

The movie literally Richard Gere on the streets of New York City, dressed in shabby and torn cloths while the director stays hidden in a car a few feet away, recording.

What Richard Gere said of the experience is this: It wasn't just that I was invisible; I was a black hole. Not one single person recognized me. "People actively avoided me," the 65-year-old actor continues. "It wasn't that folks didn't notice me; they could see and hear someone asking for change from two blocks away. It was that I annoyed them. I interpreted their day with my presence. no one

wanted to take the time to really see me. They would just walk by and pretend that I didn't exist.

In our text today, no one saw Bartimaeus, well, no one except one-the one who came to bring the Kingdom of God to earth, a kingdom where the blind would see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk and the outsider will be welcomed, who came to show us that the same Kingdom of God is in our midst day in and day out. Now is the time to open our eyes. Now is the time to listen to the cries for justice and peace. Now is the time to practice our faith by raising our voices and saying that this hate and hurt must stop. By saying no longer can we just ignore the issues. By saying God in your mercy, restore our sights. Because maybe just maybe by doing these things, we too can bring healing and wholeness to our world.

May it be so. Amen.

