

I want to start this morning with an object lesson. Please shut your eyes for 1 minute – keep them completely shut until you hear the beep and then open them slowly...

Now many of you might have noticed that while your eyes were shut, your brain sought input from your other senses. You might have begun to sense your body resting in the pew, how your back felt or your bottom or your feet on the floor – the sense of touch. You might have begun to breathe a bit deeper, pulling scents and odors in through the nose, swallowing your saliva, tasting and smelling the air. And, most of you also might have realized that you were straining to hear sounds, listening for my watch to beep, audibly sensing the body movement around you, your neighbor sitting next to you, the folks in front or behind or maybe even across the aisle, hearing a cough, the clearing of someone's throat, or the creak of a pew – And, you may have even noticed as you opened your eyes, how there came a certain sense of relief of a sense of normalcy as light flooded the optic nerves and you looked around to check on spouse, kids, neighbors.

Close your eyes and listen as I read again the beginning verses of our text from the *Gospel according to Mark*: *Now then, they came to Jericho. And, as Jesus was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large group of folk, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the way. As he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!"* {pause} You can open your eyes now.

One of the most striking features about the *Gospel according to Mark* is how easy the writer makes it to identify with the characters in the story. Over the last two Sundays we heard about a rich man who came to Jesus asking about eternal life and we listened to how the Sons of Thunder, James and John, audaciously ask for power and glory. And, today, we hear a blind man ask for his sight. The larger picture that *Mark* describes is one of discipleship, of following Jesus along the way.

If you were to look in your Bibles and go to the end of chapter 8 in *Mark*, this particular section on discipleship begins in verse 22, when Jesus is in Bethsaida on the shores of Galilee. Some people bring a blind man to Jesus, and the friends of this sightless person beg Jesus to heal him. In our story today, the blind man himself begs outside of Jericho and asks Jesus to give him his sight.

Unfortunately, it's fairly easy nowadays to ignore others in need. Part of our reluctance is the recognition that there are those who take advantage of our desire to help, and they cannot or will not accept what we offer because of their own limitations. Another reason we ignore others is because of the sheer number of those who are in genuine need and the limited resources we have to help. Still, another reason is that our society have turned the proverbial blind eye to those whom we don't want to help or whom we have dismissed as, perhaps, beyond help. When my kids were young, they had both an action and a phrase to dismiss another of their peers: "Talk to the hand." Not po-

lite, to be sure, but it sent a clear message that the person addressed is to be ignored.

Jesus didn't ignore Bartimaeus, even though he was blind and begging. Rather, Jesus called him out; drew him up and into His presence. Are there those here in Buckingham county whom we may have dismissed, whom we overlook, maybe even, studiously ignore?

Andrew Purves notes that one of the key jobs of Christians is to see what Christ is doing in the world and to get on board with His work. Do we see Christ at work here and now? Where? And if so, are we helping others see and be a part of this work of the Kin-dom?

As I said before, *Mark's* telling of the Gospel story makes it easy to identify with the characters. We can see ourselves as a wannabe disciple, our lives filled with possessions yet unable to give them up to wholly follow Jesus. Or, we might be like James and John, who mistake Jesus' mission and purpose, seeing it only in worldly terms of power and glory. Or, we are like the crowd around Jesus, the folks who are on the road, trying at first to hush Bartimaeus as he tries to seek the attention of Jesus. Only when Jesus stopped and called to him, did the crowd turn and give a hand up to this son of Timaeus.

Perhaps, we are more like blind Bartimaeus, seeking sight from the Son of David. Calling out for mercy and for salvation, hoping in faith to see the world, to have our brain stimulated by color, to see the light dancing on the water of the lake or river, to watch the red and gold

leaves falling in the change of seasons, to have our own eyes light up as a baby smiles, or smile ourselves in unconscious empathy as we see the infectious grin of youth. Don't we also seek the sight of God, to understand that God has granted salvation and brought light to the darkness, and don't we yearn to look upon all of creation with new eyes?

Jesus stopped along His way to Jerusalem. He stopped and asked Bartimaeus what did he want of Jesus. The son of Timaeus was seeking his sight. His faith in the Son of David, the Holy One of Israel, the Son of God Himself, brought Bartimaeus the gift of life.

Can we not help others as they seek the sight of God?

Let us pray: Holy and merciful God, You alone are all-powerful, all-knowing, full of grace and love. We pray this morning that You turn aside to hear our cry, to listen as we ask for understanding, for sight, for the ability to recognize the need in others and to offer them help. Let us invite others to join us in the work of Your Son, our Lord Jesus, as part of His Body, bringing Your Kingdom into the present, fulfilling Your purpose of salvation and eternal life. Let us be the eyes and ears, the hands and feet of those whose physical limitations are mere challenges through which You show Your glory and power and love. Let us join with Bartimaeus and throw off our possessions to follow Jesus along His way. We humbly ask these things in His strong and merciful name. Amen.