1/16/22

“I want to See” (Mark 10:46-52)

Good morning! God has again given us this opportunity to gather as his church and reflect on his word. It is a time for us to reaffirm our faith in God and also to recommit ourselves to be his faithful people. There is a famous picture named “Christ knocking on the door.” It is a picture of Jesus doing exactly that: Standing outside and knocking on the door. Perhaps, many of us know the picture. What is interesting about that picture is the fact that there is no handle on the outside the door. In order for Jesus to go inside the house, someone inside has to open the door. The point is very clear. The artist who drew the picture is telling us that only we can open our hearts and minds to let Jesus in. Jesus cannot force his way in if we are not willing to let him in.

In Revelations chapter 3 verse 20, Jesus said these words. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” It is my prayer that we hear these words of Jesus and open our hearts to the Spirit of God who has gathered us together this morning and who has given us this opportunity to worship. So that we can experience God’s blessing and love which sustain us as his people.

Our scripture text this morning comes from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10 verses 46 to 52. It is a miracle story and it is a well known passage of the Bible. One day, Jesus was passing through Jericho, about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. According to the Biblical accounts, we know that Jesus began his ministry in the northern part of the Palestine. As he was preaching the Good News with his disciples, he was traveling southward towards Jerusalem. In Jesus’ time, Jericho was the town to go through in order to reach Jerusalem.

Mark’s account of the blind man, Bartimaeus, happened as Jesus was leaving the town of Jericho. We do not know exactly how long Jesus stayed in Jericho. As Jesus was making his preaching tours, multitude of crowds gathered wherever he went, and Jericho was no exception. As usual, the crowd was following Jesus as he was exiting the town. Then among the crowd was a blind beggar, names Bartimaeus. According to Mark, this blind beggar was starting to make a scene. With a loud voice, he was shouting, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” (2x).

Mark points out that this act of Bartimaeus greatly disturbed the crowd that followed Jesus. The crowd began to shout as well to quiet Bartimaeus down. We can certainly picture this scene: on one hand, the multitude of crowds and the other, a lowly individual, Bartimaeus. Biblical scholars tell us that a person like Bartimaeus, who was a beggar, did not have any status in society.

In fact, Bartimaeus simply means “son of Timaeus.” So, this beggar, Bartimaeus, did not even have his own name. He was a nobody in the eyes of society. The commentary in Homiletics Magazine explains Bartimaeus in this way. “A beggar like Bartimaeus was virtually worthless; someone who existed at the bottom of the social ladder and lived at the margin.”

When we think about the scene, it must have been such a fearful, terrifying situation for Bartimaeus. There was a shouting match between the crowd and Bartimaeus. And, most likely, it was such that Bartimaeus’ voice was buried in the voice of the crowd and could not be heard. But, Mark tells us that Bartimaeus did not stop – he even shouted louder.

Here is our first lesson from the scripture reading. In such a situation that was so terrifying and scary, Bartimaeus did not let himself discouraged and took his chance, overcoming his fears. In our experiences, we know how our fears hold us back from getting a fresh start. Fear has an incredible ability to paralyze our potential, to keep us from launching out, and to keep us from having the type of faith to move forward into God’s will. Talking about fear, I once ran across the following about fear.

It is called “Fear Does Three Things.” “Fear makes us skeptical: We are afraid of trying anything new. Fear makes us selfish: We are afraid to commit to God and others. Fear makes us short sighted: We tend to focus on the past instead of the present or future.” Fears keep us from

moving ahead. In our daily living, we run into “What ifs” time to time. For Bartimaeus, meeting Jesus on the street of Jericho that day was his “what ifs” in life.

In the midst of intimidation and intense pressure by the crowd, he stood up and desperately reached out to Jesus. Bartimaeus had a desperate need and perhaps he knew that this was his only chance to be able to see again. For that, Bartimaeus rose above his fear and kept trying to reach out to Jesus. In the Old Testament, Proverb chapter 29 verse 25, we hear these words of God. “Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.”

When we run into situations in which fear paralyzes us, we also need to rise above our fear, by trusting the Lord. When opportunity of “what ifs” comes to us, we need to take advantage of it, not allowing our fear to stop us from moving forward to God. Faith is God asking us to do something greater than we have ever done, and God is asking us to depend on Him in the process.

Going back to our scripture text, miraculously, Jesus hears the voice of Bartimaeus. Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.” Jesus stopped – he had the crowd following him and he was his way out of town. But Jesus stopped for this very insignificant person of no value who was crying out. Amid thousands of voices, Jesus heard this one voice of Bartimaeus. Then, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” as Bartimaeus stood before him. It seems like a dumb question, right? I mean, it was obvious that Bartimaeus was a blind person and what he wanted was to see again.

Jill Duffield, a Presbyterian theologian, suggested that Jesus was not asking this question to get more information on Bartimaeus. She wrote, “by asking this question – what do you want me to do for you? – Jesus was offering the dignity to Bartimaeus as a person. Jesus was offering

the dignity of asking someone long sidelined and silenced, to speak for himself as a human being, to have his voice heard, honored, and tended.” The crowds wanted Bartimaeus to be silent and stay out of sight. The multitude of people that gathered that day had no interest in Bartimaeus and there was no space, no place for Bartimaeus in that crowd. By asking the question, Jesus was acknowledging that Bartimaeus was indeed one of them and definitely had a place among the crowd. Jesus was making room for one more to belong among the crowd and was showing that publicly.

“My, teacher, I want to see again,” Bartimaeus said. Then, Jesus replied, “Go. Your faith made you well.” Immediately, he regained his sight. According to Mark, Bartimaeus did not “go” as Jesus directed. Instead, Bartimaeus began following Jesus along the way. It is not unusual for Jesus to heal someone and then tell them to go. We have seen this in several places the Bible. Jesus also healed people and he expected nothing in return from those who got healed. Healing was a complete gift offered by Jesus. The fact that Bartimaeus followed Jesus immediately after he was able to see tells us that Bartimaeus realized that healing was not the only gift he had received from Jesus. He has been transformed and has given a new life.

There was no reason for him to go back to where he came from. That was his old life when he was a beggar. He has no need to beg any longer. He can see now. This encounter with Jesus has allowed Bartimaeus to envision a life of purpose and meaning. Perhaps, he follows Jesus on the way so that he can give as he has received – the gift of mercy, the gift of being noticed, of being heard, and being respected.

His desire for healing was strong enough that he was willing to make a scene and cry out for mercy in the midst of a crowd that preferred to ignore him. And when Jesus said, “Your faith has made you well,” Bartimaeus understood that in order to stay well, he needed to live his faith and follow Jesus – not just long enough to say “Thank you” – but all along the way, every day of his life.

Today, we may not tangibly experience and see the same kind of miracles witnessed by the people in Jesus’ time. But, still, we can experience the greatest miracle of all and that is the changing of our hearts. The very fact that we can be touched by the love of Jesus and be transformed is indeed an amazing miracle. In our Gospel text this morning, the real miracle is not that the blind beggar was able to see again but that his life was completely and permanently transformed by the love and power of Jesus Christ. The real miracle story is that the blind beggar is leaving behind everything that reminds him of the man he was before being touched by Jesus.

Jesus who stopped to hear the voice of Bartimaeus is stopping for us as well and is asking us “What do you want me to do for you?” We may not be physically blind but Like Bartimaeus, we are invited to put our lives in the hands of Jesus and be touched by Jesus. We all know that spiritual blindness will hinder us from experiencing God’s mercy and grace. My prayer is that this time of meditation is the opportunity for us to reach out to Jesus and be transformed again to live our lives as the people of God. How should we answer Jesus?