

Mark 10:46-52

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Samantha Evans

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Throwing Off Our Cloaks

I encountered a man this week who was in need of some help to make ends meet this month. And as is often the case when someone comes to the church for help, they don't just need cash, they need someone to listen to them, to be present to them and their needs. To actually see them.

While I sat with this man, listening to him tell me about his life and his current circumstances, he stopped and he said, I can tell you're forcing yourself to look at me. And I responded by saying that no I was not forcing myself, it's just how I talk to people. I look at them. I don't know if he believed me or not, but he responded by saying that people don't usually look at him. They actually usually refuse to look at him, which is why he thought I had to force myself to do so.

If any of you have ever sat with me one on one, then you've likely noticed that I really do look at you. When someone is sharing something with me, I can only really listen when I'm looking at them. And I'm sure many of y'all are the same. When you are listening to your friends, your spouse, your kids, your people, you look at them. You see them. In order to hear them, to be present to them and their needs, you really have to look at them.

In the gospels, the writers use all kinds of story techniques to make their theological points. This particular text about Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, is theologically super rich. These short seven verses tell us a lot about Jesus, society, and how God calls us to be different.

And the narrator uses the concept of blindness to teach listeners about the importance of truly seeing one another. It's important to note that whenever we talk about Jesus healing blindness or deafness, we should acknowledge the ableism that is often read into these texts. I want us to be aware of this, so as to not focus too much on the healing of an individual ailment, lest we miss the point: which in this case is about society's spiritual blindness and alienation of Bartimaeus and people like him.

The more I sit with this text, the more I think that this story is not so much about the healing power of Jesus – that's part of it for sure – but the real point of this story is discipleship. Mark is trying to reveal to his listeners true discipleship, and to do so,

he portrays Bartimaeus as the exemplary disciple. He may be physically blind, but unlike the disciples and the crowds, his spiritual sight is on point.

We encounter him in his lowly state: a blind beggar, cast out of communal life, a nuisance to the people around him. And then as Jesus was on his way out town, Bartimaeus cries out for mercy, for healing, for restoration. Those around him try to shush him, mock him, etc. but undeterred, his audacious faith causes Bartimaeus to cry out even louder, until Jesus finally hears him and beckons him.

Now it's at this point that Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, literally his only possession in the entire world, and run to Jesus. Now this is significant, my friends, because this coat was all that he had to protect him. It kept him warm. It's where he stored the money he received from passersby. In fact, his cloak was even a status symbol. The only one he really had.

This cloak was everything to him. And he threw it off, discarded it, because he knew that there was something more for him. He knew that there was true healing on the horizon, and he would leave everything behind in order to attain it.

But friends, our model disciple does not stop there. For upon receiving this healing he so desired, this healing he risked everything to attain, he could have done anything. He could see again. He could have gotten a job. Started a family. Built an empire on his newfound fame. He could have done anything, but he chose to follow Jesus on the way.

Bartimaeus is lifted up for the disciples and crowds, for Mark's listeners, for every would-be disciple since. He is lifted up to show us what true discipleship looks like. What true sight really is.

And there is certainly an exhortation here to not be like the other disciples. Y'all know that's always the message in Mark. So, we learn not to shush those in need of healing. See them, hear them, tend to their needs.

But the seriously profound lesson in this text is that Bartimaeus isn't lifted up just to show us that we need to see him so we can help him, he is lifted up so we can see someone we are called to emulate.

The lesson in this text is to understand that we are Bartimaeus. We are people in need of healing. Some of us feel a sense of brokenness or alienation. Some have physical ailments that cause us pain and suffering. Many of us have deep spiritual and psychological needs which go unseen or untended.

The point is that there are times in our lives when we feel broken, discarded, and in need of healing. And there are many ways to respond to this feeling. We can lash out against others or ourselves. We can crumble inwardly. We can just go about our days in executive function and allow ourselves to feel nothing at all.

Or, we can respond like Bartimaeus. I gotta tell y'all that I am moved in the depths of my soul, by the wild and audacious screams of Bartimaeus. Have mercy on me! Heal me of these wounds. Allow me to see again! Allow me to find my place in God's story. Let me be whole again. Connected again. Let me feel unbroken again.

I aspire to respond to pain, to hardship, to any experience or feeling of brokenness, I aspire to respond from this day forward just like Bartimaeus did. Whenever I am in the need of healing, of assurance, of God's presence with me, I want to cry out for it. And anytime someone around me, or even that inner critic within me, tells me to be quiet, I want to yell even louder.

Have mercy on me, and let me see again! Let me feel again. Let me be me, whole and good and beloved, again.

And friends, I exhort y'all to do the same. Cry out for the healing that you need. Be audacious enough to demand it and to trust that it is possible for you to be healed. To feel whole. To feel secure enough to metaphorically throw off your coat, and venture out to follow Jesus on the way.

Because here's the thing, so often our comforts get in the way of our true healing, of our true destiny as healed, freed, beloved and sent disciples.

We cling to our cloaks because they're all we have. We may be fill in the blank, but at least we have our cloaks. Our comfort, our security, our status. We may be blind beggars, but at least we have our cloaks.

My friends, as we near Consecration Sunday, when we make our pledges for the coming year, and are the ruling elders meet to discern how best to use those pledges, my hope and my prayer is that we can seek to be like Bartimaeus.

Money makes us anxious, I know. There never seems to be enough. We always want to do more, we want to be good and faithful stewards, but sometimes our brokenness gets in the way, sometimes our cloaks hold us back, sometimes we just fail to see what God is asking us to see.

So let us aspire this day and every day to be more like Bartimaeus. Audaciously asking for the healing we need, trusting so deeply that it is on the horizon that we

jump up, shred our cloaks, and run to Jesus. Only to be healed and led all the way to true restoration and complete healing, all the way to God.

In the name of our Triune God, who creates, sustains, and redeems us all. Amen.