

October 24, 2021

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

“Right Sight”

Mark 10:46-52

You might listen to today’s Gospel lesson about blind Bartimaeus having his sight restored and be like, “That’s nice. Jesus cured his blindness. How sweet.”

You shouldn’t do that when Jesus cures blindness. The prophet Isaiah clearly speaks of God coming in glory and follows with “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened...” so this is more than a neat miracle. When Jesus cures blindness it is a divine work of God arrived to fulfill His promise of redemption for His creation. It’s a big deal.

But the other thing you might say if you’re reading through the entirety of Mark’s Gospel is “Jesus cured a man’s blindness...again.” Back in chapter eight we had this: *“And some people brought to [Jesus] a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, ‘Do you see anything?’ And he looked up and said, ‘I see people, but they look like trees, walking.’ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and when he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And he sent him to his home, saying, ‘Do not even enter the village.’”*

The same healing, but huge differences! In the first an unnamed blind man is brought to Jesus. In the second Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, then springs up and comes to Jesus. In the first the man is strangely healed in two stages by Jesus laying on hands, in the second Jesus simply assures Bartimaeus *“Go your way; your faith has made you well”* and the miraculous deed is fully accomplished. In both cases Jesus says the formerly blind person may go, but note the huge difference. The first guy goes home; Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way to Jerusalem!

Why these differences? Well, we can speculate until the cows come home about that. But if you simply read the text, it may jump out at you that after that first healing is when Jesus clearly explains to the disciples that He is going to be crucified and then rise from the dead. He does this not just once, but three times in between these healing—plus you have Peter identifying Jesus as the Christ and then Jesus spectacularly identifying Himself in the glorious transfiguration on the mountain top. You might say it has been made much more clear, at least for the reader, who Jesus is and what His mission is.

This contrast between these two healings of blind guys is worth contemplating as the readers of the story because, well, Jesus has come to us in His Word and Sacrament. He has healed us of our blindness to the Gospel and gifted us with the eyes of faith, enabled us to see the promise of salvation fulfilled. I’m not sure if it was Saint Mark’s intent that we do this, but I can’t help but contemplate Christian faith in light of the experience of these used-to-be-blind guys.

What I mean is that we stand greatly blessed by God through Christ simply by Creation—our being made a human being in the world. We have life. We draw breath. We get to experience joy, wonder, laughter, love, happiness, tacos; so many things that make life great and worth living. True, we also face the pain, sorrow and tragedy of a world fallen into sin. But let’s face it, overall we tend to really like being alive here on planet earth. We can see that Jesus has been very, very good to us—is being very, very good to us.

But if that’s as far as we go, it’s incomplete sight. It’s good, but it’s way less than Jesus is doing. In some way we’ve been brought to Jesus and we’ve received Him and His blessing, but

our vision isn't grasping all that there is, like that nameless blind guy could see at first, but not rightly. And in the end what does that guy do? He leaves Jesus on good terms, but he goes back to his life.

And there are people in the world and even in the church like this. They like Jesus just fine. They think He is a great Son of God and they pray to Him now and again, maybe do the go-to-church thing; maybe not. He's done really good stuff for them. But...ultimately...everything is about their life and they're going back to it. They see Jesus having come into their life in some ways, but in the most important ways, they just aren't perceiving it.

And then there are the other people who have been made to see by Jesus with the difference being what Christ foretold three times between those healing—His cross. His tomb. His resurrection. That makes all the difference!

If you see that, perceive what that has accomplished for you, then you have clear and right vision of Jesus. And that reality commands your actions, your thoughts, your life.

You don't need to be brought to Jesus—you jump up and come to Him! You cry out to Him continuously! It is crystal clear what Jesus is. He not some good-guy God who hangs out giving you a pretty good life here on earth. He's the God of love who sacrificed Himself and reconciles you with the Father and restores you to the perfect, holy and eternal life you were designed for! Seeing Jesus rightly, you simply can't go back to old worldly life. You can't!

Like that first guy, Jesus told Bartimaeus to go home saying, "*Go your way; your faith has made you well.*" But Bartimaeus was like, "Nuh, uh. That aint happen' dude. From here on out I'm with you!" and he followed Jesus. He saw clearly that there was no other choice but to follow His Savior. His eyes were healed. He could have walked. But He knew there was so much more to receive that He followed Jesus.

I'm pretty sure he followed Jesus all the way into eternity. I say that simply because Mark tells us his name; Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus. You wouldn't normally get so detailed about a blind beggar. But I think Mark uses the name because Bartimaeus is still around, hanging out in the first-century Christian church, witnessing to how much the Savior had done for him. Not for his blindness, but for his salvation. Following Jesus to Jerusalem he would have seen the cross, the empty tomb, the risen Christ. So I'm pretty sure the vision of the eyes of faith he received that day on the road just became clearer and clearer and those eyeballs Jesus healed that day will one day behold the risen Christ enthroned in glory in heaven.

I say all this as an exhortation to myself and each one of you to pursue that same vision.

You who were blind have been made to see. Your blindness was washed away in your Holy Baptism into Christ. You see clearly the body and blood of Christ present in His gift of the Sacrament of the Altar for the forgiveness of sins. Your ears have been opened so that when you hear His Gospel Word, you can see God's promises of salvation through prophets like Isaiah fulfilled in the true and real God-made-man for you Jesus Christ—crucified, died, risen and reigning this day and into eternity.

Don't let that fade. Don't let the world and your sinful desire for it cloud that reality so that Jesus is made just a real nice God hanging out here while you return to your life here, absent the vision of the eternal truth Jesus has won for you.

Each day be like Bartimaeus. Call out to Christ, even though the world may rebuke you for doing so. Hear Christ's call in the Gospel and spring up and come to Him. Daily receive His full and complete healing from sin and death in the washing of your baptism. And joyfully, clearly seeing Jesus for the loving Savior and King that He is, follow in His way.

Amen.