

“What do we want Jesus to do for us?”

Mark 10: 46-52

August 22, 2021

A Sermon Preached by Reverend Debbie S. Osterhoudt

This morning we are concluding our consideration of how God has been present in the life of this congregation since June 1984. Actually, this morning we will consider, based on how God has been present with this family of faith in the past 37 years, how God might be calling us into the future. Based on how we have been shaped by the events of history, how do we envision the future. Vision. That is what we are considering. Over the next several months, you will have an opportunity to engage in this conversation about the future of Peace Presbyterian Church. Immediately following Labor Day weekend, you are invited to participate in a congregation wide survey. We will be sending you specific instructions on how to take the survey. In October, you will be hearing the results of that survey – how you as a family of faith see yourselves as well as the future. So, we turn from history now to future vision. This morning’s scripture reading describes the last healing story in the Gospel of Mark. It concludes an entire section characterized by Jesus’ attempt to instruct his disciples or enlighten their understanding of what it means to be a follower of the Son of God. After this encounter with the blind Bartimaeus, Jesus will begin the journey to Jerusalem; a journey which will take him to betrayal, crucifixion and ultimate resurrection.

Prayer for Understanding:

Read Mark 10: 46-52

Blind. What must it be like to be blind? I asked myself this question this week as I thought about Bartimaeus. I'd like you to help me out this morning - what do you think it must be like to be blind? The words darkness, fear, aloneness, dependence on others come to my mind. What words would you use to describe blindness?

Apparently, Bartimaeus did have sight at one time and then he lost it. We don't know how or why. We only know of Bartimaeus' response to his situation - his request that Jesus restore his sight. So Bartimaeus was robbed of sight at some point in his life. The tables of fate turned against him. What an incredible, maybe unpredictable, loss. And after the loss, Bartimaeus spends his days sitting by the side of the road, just outside the community (because that is where the poor and the physically limited hung out in Jesus' time), begging for money, food, perhaps clothes or anything else that he needed in order to survive. I wonder where his family was. He is described as the son of Timaeus. What has happened to his father and the rest of his family? Did he have friends? If he did, then surely, he wouldn't have been begging outside the city gates. So, I surmise that not only had he been robbed of his sight and cast into a world of darkness, but Bartimaeus was also alone to endure his fate.

Because this story of Bartimaeus' blindness follows on the heels of the request from disciples James and John for power and privilege, I believe that the gospel writer wants us to consider not just physical blindness but spiritual blindness. In the previous scene Jesus asks the same question of his disciples that he asks of Bartimaeus. "What is it that you want me to

do for you?" And brothers James and John respond "assign us seats to your left and to your right at the heavenly banquet table in the kingdom of God." Good ole James and John are seeking power and control and prestige and privilege. Their response to Jesus' question is a sad indictment on the self-absorbed values we pursue in our world, more than we would like to admit. Power, control, prestige, special seating at God's table. When Jesus asks the same question of Bartimaeus, he responds without hesitation, "Restore my sight." When contrasting the two answers, we see that we can just as easily suffer from spiritual blindness as physical blindness. It reminds me of the quote: Nothing is so tragic as those who could see but refuse to see. Once Helen Keller was asked "Isn't it terrible to be blind?" She answered, "Better to be blind and see with your heart than to have two good eyes and see nothing." James and John were spiritually blind; in their quest for power, control, privilege, they simply don't get it.

In Bartimaeus we have a model of a disciple that does get it. This story of the healing of Bartimaeus' sight has all of the marks of faithful discipleship.

1. Bartimaeus knows that he is not whole. He recognizes, even in his blindness, that he is in need of healing. The first step toward healing and wholeness is an awareness of our dis-ease. It may be physical; more likely it is spiritual. What is causing our blindness? What darkness enfolds us? Bitterness, anger, hatred? Are we blind to our own sinfulness; has guilt cast us into darkness? Do we think of ourselves as unlovable and does this inability to love ourselves cause us to strike out at others? Do we justify ourselves by damning or blaming others? Is it greed and jealousy that erodes our ability to see and love? The first step

in discipleship is a growing awareness of our need for healing and a willingness to step out of the darkness, where we tend to hide.

There was once an employer who needed to contact his employee at home about an urgent problem. He dialed the number and was greeted with a child's whisper, "Hello".

"Is your father at home?"

"Yes," whispered the small voice.

"May I talk with him?"

"No."

"Well, is your mother at home?"

"Yes", came the answer.

"May I talk with her?"

Again, "No."

Thinking that a young child would not be left home alone, the employer thought he would ask if there was a person who might be baby-sitting.

"Is there anyone there besides you?"

"Yes. A policeman."

The employer wondered what a cop would be doing at his employee's home.

"Well, may I speak to the policeman?"

"No, he's busy. He's talking to mommy and daddy and the fireman."

Alarmed, the employer asked, "What is going on there? Why are all those people there?"

Still whispering, the young voice replied, "They are all looking for me."

For whatever reason - guilt, shame, fear - and it is as old as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we want to hide. Hide from God, from ourselves and each other.

2. No hiding for Bartimaeus. He recognizes what he needs and he is willing to cry out for help. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he began to shout "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Maybe Jesus would be within ear shot, maybe not. But what other hope did Bartimaeus have? He knew he could not heal himself and he recognized that Jesus might just be able to perform a miracle. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

It is easier sometimes to sit in the darkness, begging others or God to give us what we need for wholeness, than to accept responsibility for our own disease or blindness and do something about it. God calls us to active faith, not a passive faith. Bartimaeus actively sought Jesus, Jesus asked him "What is it you want me to do for you" and Bartimaeus was clear about what it would take to be made whole.

3. Bartimaeus became quite annoying - what with all his shouting. Many of the onlookers tried to quiet him, ordering him sternly to zip it up. Bartimaeus was disturbing their peace, interrupting their thoughts as they hurried toward whatever they were to do that day. The last thing they needed was some poor, disabled person throwing a kink into their busy schedules. "Hush up Bartimaeus, your suffering is disturbing my peace." I wondered how often I was like the crowd, hurrying past the people who needed me to stop and pay attention to their needs.

Ole Bartimaeus is gutsy. He cries louder. No hiding, no shame here. His voice will

not be silenced. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Bartimaeus has identified his disease and he desperately desires healing and wholeness. He is persistent in his cries and will not be silenced.

Discipleship means 1) recognizing our disease, 2) accepting responsibility for our blindness (accepting responsibility does not mean we are to blame) and crying out to Jesus to bring wholeness, and 3) refusing to be silenced in our quest for healing and wholeness - and not just for ourselves, by the way, but on behalf of others.

Bartimaeus also enables us to see and understand that faithful discipleship 4) expects Jesus to stop and respond to our cries, bringing wholeness and healing. Those who see through the eyes of faith expect miracles from Jesus. When we gather as the community of faith, do we really expect Jesus to answer our prayers? What do we, as members of Peace Presbyterian Church, want Jesus to do for us? What is our vision for ministry here in this place and beyond these doors?

Well, the miraculous does occur; Bartimaeus’ sight is restored.

Restoration. What is restoration? Restoration embraces the process of change, shifting from one direction toward another - lost to found, captivity to freedom, death to life, danger to safety, exile to homecoming, forgotten to remembered.

Restoration is experienced when a person or community is set free from the disappointing restraints of broken dreams or unmet expectations. The joy of restoration comes from the unexpected reversal of fortunes in a despairing situation. It may not occur how or when we expect or even in our lifetimes on this earth. But when it does occur, we share these

stories of restoration to plant the seed of hope for others who are still seeking restoration and wholeness. Bartimaeus is one such person who experienced restoration. If it were true for him, it can be true for me and you. I suspect that each one of us here this morning is yearning for some sort of restoration. With a parent, with a child, of our health, with a loved one who has died, in a marriage, in our vocations, with our God. We all yearn for wholeness. Do we come expecting Jesus to accomplish miracles of restoration?

I read a great story – a parable really – this week. Set in the early 20th century and I believe it comes from another country because the English was a bit awkward – so here is my translation. It is about a young man who excelled academically and went to apply for an advanced managerial job after graduating from college. The director who was interviewing him asked how this young man's parents had supported him through school – had they paid his tuition? The young man admitted that his father had died when he was young and his mother had worked long hours to pay for his college expenses. She worked washing and mending other people's clothes. The director instructed this young man to go home, think about the interview and what the job would entail, and take his mother's hands and wash them. The young man did as he was instructed and when he took his mother's hands in his own hands he noticed how wrinkled they were, how bruised they were. It was the first time the young man really recognized what his mother's hands did which enabled him to go to college. The young man, after gently washing his mother's hands, washed the remaining clothes in her basket. That night the mother and son talked for a very long time. The next morning, when the young man returned to the office building, the director asked him what he had learned/discovered the

night before. “Without my mother, I would not be sitting here today. We worked together last night, washing clothes and I now realized how difficult and tough a job it is. I have come to appreciate the importance and value of our relationship.” The director said, “This is what I am looking for in someone to be my manager. I want a person who can appreciate the help of others, a person who knows the sufferings of others to get something done and is grateful for their sacrifice, and a person who does not put money first but relationships.

At Peace Presbyterians do we recognize the sacrifice of so many people who have gone before us so that we can sit here this morning? Do we acknowledge the hard work and dedication it takes to engage in the ministry of Jesus Christ? And are we grateful for the relationships we share as a family of faith? Appreciation, empathy/compassion, gratitude and team work.

What exactly is it that you would have Jesus do for you? For us, collectively?