

Mark 10 : 38-46-52 Seeing

Our passage from Mark this morning relates the story of another healing of blindness by Jesus as he leaves Jericho for Jerusalem. Geographically, Jesus has traveled away from the Galilean countryside along the River Jordan to Jericho. The location in Jericho is important because it is actually not very far from Jerusalem, near to the journey's end. In some ways this case of blindness is a bookend to the healing which took place just before Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. This journey to Jericho has not been an easy trip for the disciples as Jesus has been realigning their expectations, adjusting their assumptions about what Jesus' mission in this world is. You might say that Jesus has been trying to heal their blindness. As they have made this journey it seems that the disciples who continue to argue over greatness and seek favored positions have failed to get his message. Mark now gives us another account of Jesus' healing someone of physical blindness. On the surface it might seem that no progress has been made, nothing has changed. Yet this encounter with this blind man is quite different from the earlier account. In fact, before we talk about the physical healing which Jesus does here we need to remember that healing stories in the gospels never seem to be simply a reversal of a physical misfortune. A paralyzed man stands and walks through faith and the faith of the friends who carried him to Jesus. A man stretches out a withered hand to Jesus and sees it become useful again. The connections between the healing and believing are so strong in the gospel accounts that these stories are more about growing in faith than anything else—they are about restoration not only in the physical sense, but also spiritually becoming whole. This is particularly true when it come to those about the recovery of sight. The association of seeing as involving more than eyesight is not limited to Biblical accounts. How often when something has been explained to you have you said, "I see" when you understand? Or "I don't see." When you still are in the dark about the topic. There are nine meanings given for the verb "see" in Webster's dictionary. The first one is to perceive by means of the eye. But following that, there are eight other meanings which involve awareness of, understanding of, or the experiencing of something. Keeping that association in mind, let us walk through these two bookends of healing in Mark. Just like there was no narrative need to have three separate pronouncements by Jesus about his coming death in Jerusalem to present that information to the disciples and us. In order to make the point that Jesus could restore sight, only one healing example was required. But Mark carefully gives us two. And he located them around those pronouncements and the disciples' responses. In Chapter 8 a blind man who is not named is brought to Jesus by some people, also unnamed. In our passage this morning, the blind man has a name, Bartimaeus. He is the son of Timaeus, which in itself is not particularly informative. We are told that he is Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus which is giving his name twice as Bar literally means son of. So, except that it tells us he was not just any man, but an individual, the name gives no special insight into who he was. We are also told he is a blind beggar, sitting by the roadside. This was probably his usual place to spend time and to seek alms. Beggars were very low on the status scale then just as now. When he hears the crowd which is accompanying Jesus and discovers who is passing by, he begins shouting out: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." No one takes him to Jesus. Quite the contrary, the people sternly tell him to be quite. Instead he shouts out again even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Picture the

scene—a loud crowd shouting at the blind Bartimaeus and Bartimaeus refusing to be quiet and getting even louder. We don't know the crowd's motivation in trying to quiet Bartimaeus, whether they were trying to protect Jesus or just didn't think the man had value. Yet in all the noise of the crowd, Jesus heard Bartimaeus and stood still. In the midst of the shouting and shushing, Jesus hears and responds. "Call him here." Jesus says. The crowd now relays to Bartimaeus that Jesus is calling him to come forward. The crowd tells him: "Take heart, get up, he is calling you." Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, jumps up and comes to Jesus. In the first narration, the unnamed blind man is passive. In this passage, Bartimaeus is certainly not passive. He is not only active, but persistent. Before he is healed, he hears that Jesus is passing by and recognizes who Jesus is. This is the only time in Mark that the title Son of David has been applied to Jesus as a title. In many ways Bartimaeus is not blind even when the story begins and his eyes do not see. He sees Jesus as the Messiah, the son of David. When Bartimaeus approaches Jesus, Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Does this question sound familiar? It is the same question that we read Jesus asked James and John when they approached him seeking favored positions. Bartimaeus however asks for sight to be restored, not status. "Rabbouni, let me see again." There is a shift here in how Bartimaeus sees Jesus. Bartimaeus no longer calls him Jesus, Son of David but instead he calls him Rabbouni. This title he gives to Jesus is often translated as simply "My Teacher", but it was a title indicating great reverence or respect, and could just as easily be translated as my Master. But whatever the translation, the title has transformed into indicating a personal relationship. In contrast to the earlier restoration of sight, there is no making of mud to put on the eyes. There is no need to make a second application. In fact, there is no touching of Bartimaeus at all. Jesus just tells him, "Go, your faith has made you well." Jesus pronounces the transformation and immediately, newly and rightly seeing Bartimaeus is no longer sitting beside the way, but we are told he follows Jesus on the way. It is no coincidence that physical seeing is so closely tied to these demonstrations of healing for the healing comes through faith and is not just physical. Jesus names faith as what has impelled Bartimaeus to seek contact. The story shows us what that faith is. Bartimaeus' faith is not about reciting the correct confession or subscribing to certain dogma. It is his unrelenting conviction that Jesus can and will rescue him from his need. Bartimaeus' faith is about what he does. He grasps who Jesus is. He persists despite hindrances. Blind beggars dwelt near the bottom rung of social privilege in ancient society. The crowd rebukes him for trying to gain Jesus' attention. They try to prevent the interaction. In their ignorance about who Jesus is, the focus of his message and his concern for blind beggars and others on the fringe of society, the crowd accompanying Jesus seeks to prevent Jesus from responding by shushing Bartimaeus. But Bartimaeus shouts even louder so that Jesus does hear him. It is also interesting that when Jesus stops, he does not directly ask Bartimaeus to approach. Instead, he tells the crowd to call Bartimaeus forward. It is easy to overlook this when we concentrate on the healing miracle, but Jesus involves the crowd in the process. This crowd we are told is accompanying Jesus. They are followers, who although they do not completely understand or "see" who Jesus is, have joined him and the disciples on this journey. So those who were rebuking Bartimaeus are now told to encourage him. The crowd is called into the ministry. Bartimaeus is not the only one who is given sight as the crowd is called to see Bartimaeus as someone of value. When the crowd relays the message, blind Bartimaeus

throws off his cloak as he jumps up. He is blind and you would think that he would want to keep his possessions with him. He is a beggar and that cloak was probably his only possession. He would have wrapped it around him to sleep, spread it before him for alms to be placed. But he leaves it behind, going to Jesus in confidence that Jesus can and will grant the request he is going to make. When Jesus does restore his sight he tells Bartimaeus to go. But that is not what Bartimaeus does. Instead, immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. This is another call story. Unlike the man with many possessions whom Jesus invited to come back and follow, this man who was told to go, instead followed. This is the only story of healing in Mark where the one healed became a follower. Bartimaeus and his healing can be just another simple story which illustrates Jesus' power. Or it can be a message for us about what truly seeing Jesus means. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.