

Pentecost 22 (Lectionary 30) Year B October 24, 2021

Mark 10:46-52

Epiphany, Winnipeg

A man who can't see sits by the side of the road. His name is Bartimaeus, although a lot of people just know him as that blind beggar. He sits there, he's like a real person we know or a real person we've seen, with an upside down ball cap or an empty Tim Horton's cup on the sidewalk in front of him. He's this real person. Some people pass by, some look the other way, some make eye contact even though he can't see, and maybe they smile and nod, even though he can't see. And every now and then someone stops, bends down a bit and says hello and then maybe "How are you doing today? Sure is hot, isn't it? My name's Miriam, what's yours? Here's a five. Have a good day."

This man by the side of the road – he has a name, it's Bartimaeus - he hears that Jesus is coming down the road, and pretty soon he is calling out to Jesus: "Jesus, have mercy on me!". The crowd with Jesus says, "Be quiet, go away, stop making a fuss. Jesus is busy. We're busy. This is important." But he keeps on calling out to Jesus because even though he's blind he can see when people are trying to keep him quiet, even when followers of Jesus are trying to keep him quiet, and even though he's blind he can see that Jesus might stop and listen.

And Jesus says to Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?"

And Bartimaeus says, "Let me see. Again."

Last week, and only a few verses before this meeting on the street that we hear about today, James and John came to Jesus and he asked them exactly the same question. "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said, "Give us this: Let us sit with you in all your glory."

And then Jesus goes further down the road and asks Bartimaeus, who stands before him now, "What do you want me to do for you?" And Bartimaeus just says, "Let

me see. Again.” And soon he sees again.

Let me see again. That little “again” means everything, you know. There was a time when Bartimaeus could see. Everything around him was crystal clear. There was a time when he could stand by the lake on a windy day and see the waves come rolling in, or he could stand in the same place on a calm day and see a lake like glass, with a perfect reflection of the hills on the other side. He could see a beautiful woman or a stunning man in all of their God-given glory, he could see an aged and wrinkled and wise woman in the market –she’s wondrously made by God - he could see kids chasing a ball down a dusty street...just perfect creations of God.

There was a time when he could see. He could see friends sitting at the table across the way as they wave him over to share a drink of something, he could see a legion of Roman soldiers marching down Main Street, with perfect awful power in perfect formation. He could see a hot fresh meal steaming on the plate before him. He could see. He used to be able to see. And all he asks of Jesus is to be able to see again.

There was a time...or maybe we imagine that there was a time...when everything seemed so clear. Maybe it was when your health was good, or the family was strong, or your job was secure but now all of that changed with a diagnosis or a relationship that stopped working or a virus that just shut everything down. And it won’t just start up again.

Everything seems so unclear, the vision fades.

There was a time when we thought we could see it all clearly, and this country was a good European outpost and you could make a living working retail and there was no Sunday morning hockey and everything ran smoothly. Well, it didn’t, but it’s nice to remember... And now things aren’t so clear, and we’ve changed so much.

Or maybe more to the point for us today, there was a time when we as a church could see so clearly. There were lots of people in our pews, the budget was good, and we just knew how things were done. Everyone showed up for a ten o'clock start on Sunday morning, and there were committees for everything and the choir sang between the Prayer of the Day and the First Lesson. The building bustled with activity and it seemed like the church – this church, the churches in the neighbourhood, the churches pretty well anywhere on the continent, were kind of the centre of the community's life.

But then the last thirty, forty, fifty years happened and it all stopped being so clear. Then the last twenty months happened and we hardly even set foot in the building, and now as our world seems to be opening up again it's really hard to see where to go. Will Sunday at 10:00 be what it was before, or will anything bustle again? Does bustling even matter? And what's going to happen now that we've Zoomed and virtualized our way through this pandemic that keeps on keeping on?

We used to be able to see, but now it seems the best we can see is a piece of light there and a bit of movement over there. Jesus says to us, "What do you want me to do for you?" We could say, like James and John last week, "Could you make us share your glory with you?" But Jesus isn't marching off to glory, he's walking on to the cross. Maybe we need to ask to share that. And we could also ask, like Bartimaeus by the side of the road...we could just ask, "Let us see. Again." And Jesus will open our eyes, but just like someone who who hasn't seen anything for years will open their eyes and see a different world...we are seeing a different world. And whatever it is, recognizable or not, the same or something we never expected, it's still a world created and beloved by God, and it's still a world where Jesus lives among us, and helps us to see.

But there's something else. Always something else, isn't there? Did you notice the crowd? When they first saw Bartimaeus they saw a nuisance by the side of the road

and they said, "Be quiet!" They were together, they followed Jesus, they didn't need this interruption. But Bartimaeus kept calling out, like so many who are ignored keep calling out today, and he called to Jesus again, and Jesus said to the crowd, "Call him over here." Then that same crowd that once said "be quiet" now says, "Take heart. Get up and come on over. Jesus is calling you."

We almost missed it, but there it is: It's the crowd that is healed, it's the crowd that's converted, it's the crowd who Jesus makes to see. Again. And now they see not a blind beggar, but a human. A person. Named Bartimaeus.

Jesus calls to us, even when "us" is the church. And we can see again. We don't know what anything will be like in the future, in ten years or ten weeks or even ten days. It might feel like we can't see while we try to shift around and feel our way through a new world where the furniture is changed and nothing seems to be where it was before. Then Jesus says to us, he really does, "What do you want me to do for you?" And all we have left to say is "Let us see. Again." And our eyes are being opened to see our neighbours...not a nuisance but our neighbours in a different world... a world full of people, people with names, by the side of the road or next door or in your classroom or on that little square on the screen that has become just another room in the house. People who, like us, cry out in some way or another, "Jesus, have mercy." And the one who walks that road with us has mercy and is opening our eyes. We will see. Again. AMEN.