

Being re-membered
Mark 10:32-45, 46-52

“What do you want me to do for you?”

This is the question Jesus poses to Bartimaeus, the blind man who, much to the chagrin of those around him, insists on seeing Jesus. “What do you want me to do for you?”

It seems like a rather crass question. Shouldn't Jesus know? Wouldn't Jesus have known that the man wants healing for whatever ails him? Jesus doesn't ask, “What would you like?” Or, “How can I help?” Instead, this transactional, “What do *you* want *me* to do for you?”

Bartimaeus has a ready answer, “My teacher, let me see again.”

Apparently there was a time in his life when he could see. But as a blind person, he was now unclean, a sinner, reduced to begging. Sitting by the side of the road he was at the mercy of those who were “good,” those who were coming and going...to family, to the market, to the Temple. But he...he was no longer part of that crowd. Instead, he was on the ground, literally at their feet, his life depending on any coins they might drop onto his coat.

“My teacher, let me see again.” When Jesus heard what Bartimaeus wanted, he answered, “Your faith has healed you.” And Bartimaeus could see again.

Another simple, miraculous healing.

Except, this is the Gospel of Mark. And in Mark's story about Jesus, none of the stories are simple—his stories are interwoven and build on each other in layered and complex ways. So let's complicate this story!

A first thing to say is that Mark's Gospel is all about Jesus fulfilling Isaiah's messianic prophecies:

“On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.” *29:18 (NRSV)*

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;” *35:5*

With Mark's Gospel stories highlighting the healing of the deaf and blind, he is clearly and boldly proclaiming that "This is the day of the Lord!"

But. When there's a story of someone being healed, in the middle of that story is another story of others who are blind and deaf. And don't know it. When we start paying attention to this pattern, the healing stories are usually pointing to the ones who might have the physical ability to see and hear, but they are blind and deaf to the spiritual and social and political realities of the Kingdom of God. The disciples are often the ones unable to see or hear. And this story is no exception.

As is the case in the story Bartimaeus. Before the story of Bartimaeus, Mark tells a story about an interaction between Jesus and the disciples. They were on their way to Jerusalem and at one point Jesus took the 12 aside and told them about what would happen in Jerusalem: he'd be given over to the religious leaders who would condemn him to death; he would die; and then rise up after three days.

But the disciples? Nothing. They were completely deaf. They may have heard what Jesus said, but they had absolutely no comprehension of what he meant. So out of touch, James and John responded to this vulnerable sharing by saying to Jesus, "Teacher, we have a favor."

A favor! Jesus just told them he'd be arrested and killed and they have a favor?! But Jesus humored them and asked, "What is it you want me to do for you?" The very same question he will ask Bartimaeus a little farther along the road. But right now he's asking two of his disciples, "What do you want me to do for you?"

They tell him: "We want to sit at your right hand and at your left hand when you're in your glory."

"No," Jesus answers. "No. I can't do that for you. It isn't mine to do."

What these blind disciples see is an opportunity for political power. They assume that Jesus is ascending some ladder of power and privilege and they want to be part of that hierarchy. They want the prestige of being his right- and left-hand men. They *see* the systems and structures of their current social and political context and are blindly transferring them to Jesus' and God's Kingdom. They cannot see or hear that Jesus is talking about losing, about his being condemned, about his being executed. This is the opposite of prestige. This is the opposite of power. This is the opposite of winning. Jesus is talking about being publicly shamed and humiliated and killed. But the disciples cannot see or hear, they cannot grasp the paradox of serving rather than being served, or of losing their lives to save them, or of the first being the last. They are blind and deaf to the possibility of something new rising up. They cannot imagine that God's power is in powerlessness. They cannot see that God's power is never power over. It's never a dominating or oppressing power. It's never exclusive. It's always for every body. It's always a power towards healing and wholeness.

But Bartimaeus, he could hear and see. He knew. He lived at the bottom, on the outside. He knew what it was to be mocked and spit on. He knew what it was to die yet still have his heart beating. It didn't matter that he was an outcast and on the margins of society, when he heard that Jesus was nearby, Bartimaeus remembered that he was some body. He remembered that he was the son of Timaeus, and a child of God. And Bartimaeus could see again.

We have to notice here that Jesus never touched Bartimaeus. Jesus didn't actually *do* anything for Bartimaeus. Except. Except that Jesus *looked* at Bartimaeus. He *saw* him and recognized him as a human being. Recognized him as beloved. And he says, "Your faith has healed you." Bartimaeus' faith caused the miracle. Bartimaeus trusted that he was God's beloved. Bartimaeus knew that he was God's. Even on the ground, begging for crumbs,

Bartimaeus knew that he belonged to God. And Jesus was there as a witness to that faith. The people on the road, for all this time, had been blind...they didn't see Bartimaeus. But Jesus did. Jesus saw him in all his goodness, his worthiness, his belovedness, his belonging.

In contrast, John and James had no faith in their worthiness or their belovedness or their belonging. In their insecurity what they wanted from Jesus was some assurance that they mattered. They wanted insurance that they would have a place on the inside, that they would belong.

Last Sunday Keith talked about our internal springs of water, about learning to draw on inner resources that the Spirit of God is always making available to us and for us. Surely Bartimaeus, with Jesus near, breathed deeply into his inner Source. And in doing so he remembered that he too was a son, that he was God's beloved, and that he belonged in God's Kingdom.

When we're hearing this story, I suggest we pay close attention to the disciples, especially to John and James. It's easy to be attracted to Jesus, to go right to the miraculous healing and keep our eyes there. But when we do, we miss so much of Jesus' teaching. And we miss recognizing our own blindness. And like the disciples we go around, following Jesus, listening to his teachings. Not realizing that we're still functioning within the values of the world around us. We get caught up in the traps of shame and guilt, not trusting our worthiness, our goodness, our belonging, and belovedness. Like James and John, we want assurances from God that everything will turn out right.

For me—as a white woman with a lot of privilege—for me to *see* and *hear* and *experience* the fullness of living in God's Kingdom, I must be willing to sit with Bartimaeus, at the margins. I must be willing to lose my privilege. I must be willing to sit with all the discomfort that comes with losing power and control. And in losing our lives we are saved by

remembering that we have a name, that we are God's, that we belong. When we find ourselves lost, at the margins, at the bottom...it is there...it is there that we discover the depth of our goodness, our worthiness, our belonging. When we are at the end of ourselves we discover that the end of ourselves is the beginning of our belonging...to God, to Spirit, to each other, to all others.

May we...dear FoHers and followers of Jesus...may we look at and see Bartimaeus. And let him be our teacher.

And with him, may we remember and have faith that we are God's, that we are beloved and that we belong.

Because you are, each of you, you are some body, you are good, and you are worthy.

May it be so.