

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ *When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

⁴⁸ *Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

⁴⁹ *Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”*

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” ⁵⁰ *Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.*

⁵¹ *“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.*

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

⁵² *“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. (Mark 10:46-52)*

Faith Goes to Jesus

I started going to a Lutheran elementary school like ours when I was in 5th grade. I remember one day our principal was leading a devotion and he talked about going blind. Maybe he was even using our gospel lesson for today, I don’t remember. But I do remember him saying that he would hate to lose his sight. He said that he would rather have his arms and legs cut off than go blind. I remember agreeing with him at the time. We depend on our sight for so much. It’s hard for me to imagine life without it. How I would serve as a pastor if I couldn’t see the Bible to prepare to preach and teach? How would I make calls? How would I run to the grocery store and once I got there, how would I find anything? How would I watch all my Marvel superhero movies? Of course, the truth is, people live with blindness every day in our world and most of them probably are quite content. But it’s hard for me to imagine what it would be like. How about you? Would you hate losing your sight that much? Or are there other things that would be more terrible in your mind? Most of us could probably think of things that we hope we never face. Well, what if we do? How will we get by? And even if those things don’t happen, we all have to face difficult and painful moments. What gets us through those times? Our gospel lesson shows us a man who faced great difficulties and his example points to one of the most fundamental realities of being a Christian: **faith goes to Jesus.**

I.

That’s never more true than **when there’s no hope.** Let’s face it: sometimes, in this life, there simply is no hope. We find ourselves in situations where it would take a true miracle to rescue us. That’s the situation that Bartimaeus lived in our gospel lesson for today. He was blind. But he didn’t live in our world with doctors and surgeries that can sometimes recover lost sight. And in that time and place, there were no schools for the blind, no braille to enable them to read, no crosswalk signals that made sound so that blind people know when it’s safe to cross, no government mandated accommodations in the workplace. There was your family. If that wasn’t enough, there was only one option: begging.

So what did Bartimaeus do? He begged until Jesus passed by and then he prayed. Did you make that connection in your mind? Mark tells us that Bartimaeus “began to shout” but if you think about it, he was really praying. He was going to his Lord for help. He called Jesus “Son of David.” What does that mean? The Son of David was one of the titles for the coming Messiah. This took place right outside of Jericho. For the last month or two, we’ve made the point that all these incidents took place while Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem. Well, he was almost there. The very next account in Mark’s gospel is Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. What did the people shout? “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Bartimaeus showed his faith in Jesus. He didn’t call to him because Jesus was a famous doctor or even because he was famous as a miracle worker. Bartimaeus recognized his Savior before Jesus ever walked past him that day. When his Savior drew near, he prayed to him in faith and asked for rescue. In that sense, Bartimaeus is a model for us when we face those situations that truly seem to be impossible. When the doctor tells us that there’s no more that he can do. When the place where we work closes and the job we had is just

gone. When we've made bad choices and now we have to face the consequences – in court or in our marriage or family or among people who used to be our friends. All those things can happen to us here. Sometimes, as far as we can see in this life, there simply is no remedy. We have to go through what we have to go through. But precisely at those moments, faith goes to Jesus.

My friends, pray. Pray because you know who is listening. Jesus loves you so much that he laid down his life for you. He promises that he will hear and answer every single one of your prayers. Jesus loved you so much that he left heaven itself so that he could walk the dusty streets of Israel and face the lies of his enemies and endure scourging and mockery and hanging from a cross to pay for your sins. He promises that if he loved you that much, he will never abandon you here. Jesus rose from the dead to make you holy in God's sight. He has all power to defeat sin and pain and even death here. There is no challenge that is beyond his power. Even the most hopeless situations here are easy for Jesus to solve. He promises to be with you in all things. He promises to take care of you and bring you home to heaven. Trust him and take all those things that trouble you to him and lay them at his feet.

II.

What Bartimaeus prayed is just as instructive as when. He shouted, "**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**" What is mercy? When I was a kid, we used to play a game called "mercy." Do you know what it is? You squeeze each others' hands until one person gives up and cries, "Mercy!" You cry, "Mercy!" because you want the other person to stop hurting you. In sports, a "mercy rule" says when you get so far ahead of the other team, they stop the game, because they don't want to rub anyone's face in the loss. Mercy is compassion. You see someone in trouble and you're moved to help them. God looks down from heaven and he sees how much our lives hurt and he has mercy on us. **Faith goes to Jesus when we trust his mercy.**

That's why we hope even when our situation feels hopeless. Other people might think prayers is a waste of time. When Bartimaeus shouted, people tried to shut him up. But Bartimaeus kept shouting. God always answers our prayers, but usually with actions rather than words. Sometimes, his answer is "wait." But you can't really tell for sure. So what do we do? Keep praying! Faith keeps coming to Jesus because faith trusts that God does see what is going on in my life and God does have compassion on me in my suffering.

Suffering is a real part of life in this sinful world. We build hospice centers because so many people are dying. We have so many hospitals around us that even after being here for eleven years, I still have to look up how to get to some of them. Mental and emotional hurt seem to be at an all time high. Stress and anxiety shatter families and mental health professionals can't find the time to serve everybody. How are we any different? We aren't. We pray every Sunday for people who are sick and in the hospital. In our little congregation, we have half a dozen people going through some kind of cancer treatment right now. We've had dozens of hip and knee replacement surgeries, plus all the other things that happen. Our families are just as much under siege in the modern world as the families out there. Many members of our congregation see therapists or counselors. And all that pain challenges our faith. But in a sinful world, it has to be that way.

Right now, we live by faith and not by sight. Faith is trusting what God says even when we can't see it. If believers never got sick, if we never lost people we love, if our families never were under pressure and anxiety never tortured us, it would be pretty easy to be a believer. If all we had to do was pray and instantly all our problems went away while the rest of the world suffered, it wouldn't take faith to be a child of God. But right now, God hides himself. He works behind the scenes through the gospel and through natural means. So instead of just doing miracles to heal us, he lets doctors and medicines do their work. It's a lot slower than what Bartimaeus experienced, but God still accomplishes what he wills for us. Instead of waving his hand and healing our hearts, God lets us struggle with weakness and fear and he hides himself behind family and Christian friends who love and support us. He hides himself behind mental health professionals and also behind pastors who often feel like we're not doing enough. But God works and accomplishes what he wills for us. God even hides himself in the pain and sorrow. He uses it to teach us to let go of this life and trust in him alone. He works through all those things to rescue us here and finally to bring us home.

The most important thing is bringing us home. Sometimes, pain is a necessary part of that. Virtually every person in the Bible suffered. Joseph, the son of Jacob, was sold into slavery and didn't see his family for twenty years. You can imagine how many times he prayed and asked to go home. That never happened, although eventually, his family did come to him. God had a plan to bring Joseph and his family home to heaven and to bring forth an enormous amount of blessings. For that all to work, Joseph had to suffer here. God has a

plan to bring you and me home to heaven. God has a plan that includes blessings that we can't see yet in this life. God does not promise that on this side of heaven we will ever be able to see all that he does for us. But he calls us to trust that he loves us and that he is doing all things for our good and that he will hear and answer our prayers according to what is best for us.

It's easy to do that when he gives us what we ask for right away. But what about when God says no? What about when God says wait – maybe even wait for years? What about when God answers our prayer in a different way than we expected? It's easy for us to wonder if God is really paying attention. It's easy for us to think that God is punishing us. It's easy for us to think that if God loves me, he must make this hurt go away. But how long did Bartimaeus have to sit by the road and beg before Jesus finally came by and healed him? How hard did he have to shout to make himself heard over the crowd that was shushing him? Faith goes to Jesus because we trust his mercy. But faith also trusts that he will hear and answer our prayer in the way that does the most to grow our faith and bring us home.

If our faith were perfect, we would never question what God is doing. Sadly, in this life, our faith will never be perfect. The unbeliever inside us is always tearing that faith down. But that's why Jesus came. He died because our faith is so far from being perfect. He paid for that sinner inside us. He rose to declare that we are forgiven for all that sin and unbelief. So now, when we pray, God never says "no" because he's punishing us. Even when he lets us face the consequences of our sinful choices, that's not punishment. He's teaching us to live more Christian lives. But he has already forgiven us.

And God promises that we will go home. If Jesus doesn't come back first, one day he will end our suffering here and we will join him in heaven, where we will never know pain again. When the time is right, Jesus will return. He will renew this world and put an end to all pain and sorrow and transform us. We will live with him in joy forever. No matter how much pain we face here, that promise will still come true. Trust it and go to Jesus for mercy when you need it most.

You know, it's funny. I opened my Bible to begin studying this text on Tuesday right after an eye examination. It was particularly striking because the doctor said something I had never heard before. He said the pressure on my eyes was high which might be the first signs of glaucoma. So he told me I needed to come back. Now, he said it's not an emergency and he doesn't see anything yet and my guess is that it's nothing. But when I got back to church I read this account of Jesus healing a blind man. It reminds me that my sight is in Jesus' hands. My life, my health, my family are all in Jesus' hands. So are yours. He healed Bartimaeus to show us that he has the power to conquer all that we face and he has the love to do what is best for us. He calls us to bring all our troubles to him and trust that he will take care of them. And when we do that, he says to us, "Go, your faith has healed you." You brought those troubles to the right place and Jesus will take care of them. Amen.