

Sermon Notes: October 27, 2024

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Focus: Blindness and Insight

Reading Bartimaeus for my sermon this week surprised me. So many experiences with people who have ADA limitations flashed around my memory. Personally, I am physically able to do 90% of what I could do when I was twenty. My knee gets achy when I sit too long. I can no longer read prescription bottles without reading glasses and a flashlight. I can't stand running anymore. I am little slower, and little sorer in the morning. Overall, I am incredibly fortunate that all the machinery still works and that, mostly, I can go anywhere at any time I choose.

Jesus was always lifting the broken. He was not blessing them so they could admire him at his feet. He did just the opposite: In him, the weak found enduring strength. In him, the broken found enduring resilience and could branch out into the world. I believe in healing, both the supernatural variety and the natural miracles of human creativity in medicine.

It feels like spiritual cruelty however to make the supernatural version the highest good. Healing must be communal and not necessarily require people to throw away crutches. Making the built environment accessible for people with disabilities makes the world better for all of us. It's not just charity for those with limitations. I suspect most of us think helping people with disabilities is an individual, noble thing to do. However, I dream of a world where the dignity of going anywhere anytime is not something we personally, magnanimously grant, but an expectation for our architecture and technology.

Right after seminary, I went to Villanova for the Episcopal Preaching Excellence Program. (I have since learned that 10% of all seminarians have been part of the program.) On the second night of the event, we went out to a fancy dinner. One of our participants was in a wheelchair. The party room was on the second floor (no elevator). We were all willing to carry him up, but he refused. He insisted that we go to a restaurant where he could enter like the rest of us. I was very uncomfortable: couldn't he just let us help and make nice? I am so glad that he refused and challenged my inherent ableism. The other restaurant was delightful for everyone.

Many accommodations that started for the physically disabled are now part of regular life that benefits everyone. Curb cuts and electric toothbrushes were intended to help those with physical limitations, but it is also great for kids on bikes and people who sleepily brush their teeth. I want to help make the world less hostile to everyone especially as we all inevitably slow down.

In the next section, I want to share details of today's story about Bartimaeus.

Spiritual Blindness and Faith Bartimaeus' physical blindness is a stand in for spiritual blindness. His recognition of Jesus as "Son of David" signifies insight that many around Jesus lacked, including the disciples. In last week's gospel, James and John asked Jesus for positions of power (Mark 10:35-45). (Remember

the Sons of Thunder and my lame attempt at drumming during children's time last week?) Bartimaeus embodies the irony that a blind man has greater spiritual vision than those who have been following Jesus closely.

Bartimaeus' Title for Jesus: "Son of David" Bartimaeus calling Jesus "Son of David" is not just a compliment. This is one of the clearest proclamations of Jesus as the Messiah, coming from someone on the margins. "The Son of David" was supposed to be a strong Messiah and a powerful political revolutionary. Jesus *doesn't* reject the title from Bartimaeus, but he also doesn't fulfill these expectations in the ways many hoped. What king would use his intense focus on a blind man, if he was trying to build a revolutionary guard?

The Marginalized and the Kingdom of God As a blind beggar, Bartimaeus is on the economic and social outskirts of Jericho. In the ancient Jewish context, physical blindness could have been interpreted through the lens of Levitical laws regarding ritual purity (Leviticus 21:16-23), which limited the temple service of the physically disabled. By healing Bartimaeus, Jesus not only restores his physical sight but also symbolically restores him to full participation in the community. Those who treated him with pity have to reassess their whole relationship to him.

Faith Jesus explicitly links Bartimaeus' healing to his faith: "Your faith has healed you." The Greek word here for "healed" (σώζω, *sōzō*) can also mean "saved." Bartimaeus' encounter with Jesus is not just physical healing but also spiritual empowerment. Bartimaeus' faith is active and persistent. Despite being rebuked by the crowd, he cries out even louder to receive this gift.

Symbolism of the Cloak When Bartimaeus throws off his cloak (Mark 10:50), there is symbolic meaning behind this action. In the ancient world, a beggar's cloak was essential—it served as a means for collecting alms and as protection from the elements. He believes that once Jesus heals him, he will no longer need it. The act of leaving behind his cloak might also be seen as a metaphor for leaving behind his old life—much like how the disciples left their nets to follow Jesus (Mark 1:18). It's an act of commitment and trust.

(Like I said in page 1, I believe in healing *and* I hope we are creating a healing world that doesn't require people to be in a perfect state of health to be in the center of community.)

Jesus' Question: "What Do You Want Me to Do for You?" Jesus asks Bartimaeus the same question he asked the thundering James and John earlier: "What do you want me to do for you?" While James and John sought personal glory, Bartimaeus simply asks for mercy and healing embodying the simple trust we can have in Jesus as we venture out on our various lives.

I hope you found the broad reflection on page 1 helpful and the biblical details at the end of page 1 and on page 2 interesting as well. Have a great week. **Todd**