

*“So throwing off his cloak, (Bartimaeus) sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.”*

The blind man calls out to Jesus in the familiar prayer, the Jesus Prayer, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”. He cries out to Jesus as he sits alongside of the road and when he is healed, he follows Jesus on the way into Jerusalem. Mark wants us to notice this moment of faith, and also that Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” How often have we been confronted in a moment of struggle and pain and asked God for what we want God to do for us. Does our request for healing, although perhaps not always a cure, enable us to walk down the road with Jesus, to walk the way of Love and kindness and service more authentically?

In the Gospel of Mark this moment of encounter and healing does not have Jesus touching him. Bartimaeus cries out; the crowd tries to keep him quiet; Jesus turns and asks his followers to bring Bartimaeus to him, (Jesus here does not walk to him); Bartimaeus leaves behind what he owns—his cloak and responds to Jesus that he wants to see again. This is a paradigm of faith for Mark. We only know that Bartimaeus follows Jesus. I wonder how he lived his life with new sight.

Seeing things differently can upend what we do and allow us to take on a new life with determination and purpose.

Mary Ellen Pleasant has a tiny park named after her in Oakland and is remembered for her civil rights action—going to court to enable blacks to be able to ride on the streetcar in San Francisco—and winning-- during the Gold Rush, a business entrepreneur, and an abolitionist. Her story begins with the values she learned on the East Coast working for a Quaker family who taught her business and the power of the underground railroad to deliver slaves out of bondage. She was a founding donor to Saint Mary's College.

Mary Ellen Pleasant is little known and today I bring her to you as a woman who earned money to help slaves into the Underground Railroad; she

provided services to individuals which we would now call social services, she used her wit and her business acumen to become a millionaire—in order to share with others. She used the court system, her position of wealth, her disguise as a cook and housekeeper, and tried to use the media to fight her cause for freedom. She used the blinders of others' assumptions to get things done. We are told she died in poverty—her estate still being litigated after she died.

We have been richly blessed in this place and turn our faces to follow Jesus on the road. How we will share the riches we have been given, the new eyes we have been given, and the talents and gifts that are uniquely ours?

*Pastor Susan*



Computer-enhanced reproduction of a never-before published photo of Mary Ellen Pleasant, from the scrapbook of Emma Scott Jones. Courtesy of Careth Reid and Jesse Warr III. © Bibbs 1993