

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro  
27 October 2024

10:30 a.m. MT Worship  
Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Calvary Baptist Church  
Denver, Colorado

## ***“From Sight to Vision”***

First Sermon in the Stewardship Series, *Giving for Goodness*  
Part of the Annual theme, *Thriving in Goodness for Good and for GOOD*

*NOTE: A sermon is a spoken word event. This manuscript served as a guide but is not exact to what was preached in the moment.*

### ***Mark 10:46-52***

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

I was talking to a friend this week about life, the election, and all the tension, anxiety, and worry swirling in the air, and she said: “Well you know what my grandma always used to say: ‘*We shall see, we shall see....said the blind man to his deaf son.*’”

Hmm. I suppose it does feel like that right now. Like a complete inability to communicate with one another in our country: “*We shall see, we shall see....said the blind man to his deaf son.*”

But what if you don’t just read tragic irony into this quip and actually gave it a bit more thought. Because this statement doesn’t give enough credit to the deaf son, who can probably read his father’s lips and facial expressions with astonishing accuracy; and most likely can even feel what is being said through energy, vibrations. And—it doesn’t give enough credit to the blind father, who

can most definitely *sense* what is to come better than anyone who can physically *see* anything, for we who have physical sight, are often I easily distracted or hyper-focused—seeing only what we want to see, or averting our eyes from what we don’t. And of course if we have our hearing, we have selective listening for sure.

“*What do you want me to do for you?*” (vs 51) Jesus asked Bartimaeus, the man begging on the side of the road who was blind.

“*My teacher, let me see again,*” (v51) he answers. “*Go; your faith has made you well,*” Jesus replies. “Immediately he **regained his sight and followed him on the way,**” (vs52) Mark writes.

Bartimaeus—who we know was able to see at some point in his life because of the textual clues

“let me see **again**” and “**re-gained** his sight”—had his physical sight restored by Jesus on the side of the road outside of Jericho. But he gained his **vision** on the inside of the painful, exclusionary, lonely experience of blindness. Isn’t that curious?

Bartimaeus *could not see* to save his life, and as a beggar, he was dependent on people around him to meet his every need—and yet—he had a *vision* for who Jesus was and what Jesus could do in his life. He heard a large crowd moving along the road, and as soon as he got whiff that Jesus “might” be in that crowd, he held nothing back, his Vision for What Jesus Could Do springing him to his feet as he cried, “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*”

Our modern ears may not ‘hear’ the significance of his cry, but this is a pivotal moment in Mark’s Gospel. This is the last event before Jesus enters Jerusalem. It’s the beginning of the end. Jesus is journeying toward the last days of his life, he’s headed into a week blurred with praise and pain, celebration and suffering. And he’s followed by confused crowds as he leaves Jericho—people who do not understand

his affinity for the poor, the vulnerable, the weak, those in need—for these confused crowds, even as Bartimaeus is calling out to Jesus, “*sternly order him to be quiet*” (vs 48).

This crowd has the same confusion that Jesus’ disciples had a few verses earlier in Mark 10 when the disciples “spoke sternly” to people trying to bring their children to Jesus. Jesus cut through that confusion with crystal clear clarity in a hurry, “*Let the children come to me and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs,*” (10:13-14)

And now, Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem where he’ll be welcomed by crowds waving palms of praise who, days later will halt their “hosannas” and holler instead, “Crucify him!” (Mark 15:13). Confused indeed.

You see, Jesus is no stranger to confused crowds who do not yet see who he is and the life he is inviting them to live, and so perhaps this is why Bartimaeus’ cry cuts straight through to him: “*Son, of David, have mercy on me!*” And to that cry, Jesus immediately responds, “*Call him here.*”

The title “Son of David” is only used twice in the whole of Mark’s gospel, and both are from the mouth of Bartimaeus in this text (vs 47 & 48), “*Son of David, have mercy on me.*”<sup>1</sup> Most of Mark denotes Jesus as the “Son of Man” but here, in *this* moment, in the midst of this confused crowd trying to keep this blind, begging man away from Jesus so he can get on his way “unbothered,” Bartimaeus speaks into confusion with a clarity that he alone can see: Jesus is not just the son of any man, he is the son of David—the Messiah, the Anointed One, the One foretold by the prophets, the One from the line of King David who has come to restore the people of God to the kin-dom of God—Jesus, Love Incarnate, the Liberator. The One who brings Hope, Possibility, Salvation (literally, healing), the One who brings New Life, New *Vision*.

How is it that blind Bartimaeus—who has never met Jesus before—can see so clearly what no one else can?

Well, Mark gives us some clues. Bartimaeus—who once could physically see and could

**remember** what that was like—he had now since spent years and years navigating the world on the margins. Not only the margins of light and sight, living in darkness and occlusion, but the margins of society—literally on the edge of the city of Jericho, cast out from community, neither located there or anywhere...but living on the road, the place of transition, of uncertainty, of danger, of loneliness—constantly hearing footsteps and donkey hoofs go by, yet rarely a person stopping longer than it takes to toss him a coin or two (if he’s lucky). And their aim would have to be pretty good for that coin to actually land in his hand.

In his poverty, in his suffering, in his hunger and his want, Bartimaeus has been living on the margins of decision-making, excluded from Temple life. The margins of family, living on the streets even though we’re told he has a father; he is the son of Timaeus. And even if Timaeus has died, surely there are other relatives around, but Bartimaeus is on the streets. He knows the distinct pain of having a family but not being wanted by

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<sup>1</sup> Victor McCracken, “Mark 10:46-52: Theological Perspective,” eds. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised*

*Common Lectionary Year B, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2009, 214, 216.

them...a distinct pain that some of you know, I know.

Bartimaeus, in his blindness, had years and years to **remember** and think about what it was like when he could see, but even more, to remember what it was like to be SEEN by others. To matter enough to be seen. And here he is now, pondering the difficulty of his experience without physical sight; he has become wholly dependent on God and others for survival. In this season, Bartimaeus had the unique mixture of time, loss, need, and the vantage point of discrimination and suffering, which drove him to **Dream. To vision beyond what those around him could see.** To drill down (or up) to what was most essential to cultivate a faith that absolutely belief in God who could do things beyond what others thought possible because when you are pushed to the outside, to the margins, it actually pushes you to see the whole of everything that is happening in society and in your community. You can't help but see it, because you feel it every experience you have.

We talk about this a lot at Calvary, but when you draw out the circle of society and imagine

those in the center as holding power, and those on the edges as lacking power and resources, and those in the middle somewhere in between...then it's clear to see how community inclusion works. If the needs and voices and lives of those on the outside are tended to, then automatically that includes the needs and voices and lives of those in the middle and the center, but it doesn't quite work in the other direction. The more insular we are, the more we only care for ourselves; the more we only see ourselves.

And what was true today, was true back then, too.

The disciples—those closest to Jesus who had spent every waking and sleeping hour with him for three years, who had listened to all his parables and teachings, who had witnessed miracles and spent time around tables eating with people they probably would have rather not had to deal with, those who had literally been told directly by Jesus who he was and what was going to happen to him with his suffering, death, and resurrection (three times!)—the disciples, with as close proximity as they had to Jesus, as central as they were—**could not see what Bartimaeus could**

**see with utter clarity: the vision of life lived *fully* in faith;** not a life secured by certainty, but a life that takes risks, a life that jumps up and throws off one's cloak (literally the only possession we're told Bartimaeus had), risking it all just for the chance to see if maybe Jesus could help him, heal him, inspire him, change him.

There were no guarantees.  
There never are, are there?

You see, Jesus asked Bartimaeus the same question that he asked James and John, the Sons of Zebedee, last week: *"What do you want me to do for you?"*

Their answers could not be more different. James and John, you'll remember, two of Jesus' close disciples who knew him the best, said, *"Grant us to sit one on your right and one on your left in glory,"* (Mark 10:37)—a petition for power, security, position, place; it's a question posed from Fear.

Bartimaeus, in contrast, gives a plea rooted in Faith: *"My teacher, let me see again."* A plea rooted in Vision. Because you only ask to regain your sight if you believe there is still

a dream or a vision out there worth seeing!

Jesus' response is clear, at least to Bartimaeus it seems: *"Go; your faith has made you well,"* (vs 52). And Marks continues, *"he immediately regained his sight and followed him on his way,"* (vs 52).

But, it's less clear to us, isn't it?

Healing stories like this that correlate faith to wellness are impossible to understand. Either it means that some people just pray harder or just have a deeper faith and that is why they are healed and others are not—which just makes zero rational or spiritual sense when you think of all of the faithful people you know, yourself include, who suffer deeply and pray fervently. If you are sick or suffering right now, or praying for someone who is, hear this: faith does not guarantee healing. I wish it did. Faith grants hope that our suffering, even in death, is not the end of our story. Faith allows us to endure suffering in the knowledge and love of a community and Savior who is right there with us. Think of every person that you can in the pages of scripture, and I guarantee you they suffered. It

is a part of being human. It just is.

Healing stories in the Bible can lead us to believe that some people get miracles, and others do not. And I get that. It's certainly one way to read these stories, and when it's our loved one, we all want "the miracle." But perhaps a more meaningful, and even more truthful way, to read these stories is to celebrate what happens in the lives of these particular people in this one particular moment of their journey and celebrate it with them as a 'win.' All the while keeping in mind that their "miracle of a moment" is just that—a moment.

We don't know the years they endured leading up to this moment, and we don't know what happens after this moment. Bartimaeus is not guaranteed a day more of his life having regained his sight. He could die tomorrow. He could suffer from a different ailment, or perhaps more likely, whatever caused him to lose his eyesight in the first place might come back. Just as so many cancers or things do...the highs and lows of remission and recurrence are like whiplash. There is so much we don't know about Bartimaeus' story.

But what we do know about this moment in his life, is that something about his faith in Jesus, his belief that God could do something in his life beyond what he could see for himself, led him to have remarkable vision. According to Google, vision is "*the ability to think about, dream about, or plan the future with imagination or wisdom.*" You'll probably never hear me say this again, but in this case, God would probably agree with Google.

God—through the life, message, death, and resurrection of Jesus—invites us to dream about our future with imagination. If we are suffering and near death, that imagination might be about what happens next and how God will carry us across the threshold, leading us into the embrace of our ancestors, caring for us and for our loved ones along the way.

If we are at any other point in our life (not near death), our dreaming is about what might be possible in the future in **THIS** life. Here and now.

And the moment in **THIS** story when we know that the lesson here isn't about Bartimaeus' physical sight but his spiritual

vision, is when Mark says he followed “the Way” (vs 52).

From Mark 1:3, when we hear the words of Isaiah invoked: “*Prepare ye the way of the Lord!*” (thank you Godspell!)—to the fact that Mark using the term “the way” five times in this section of his gospel as Jesus’ teaches about discipleship—to the explanation of The Way that Luke gives in Acts 9:2, noting that before Jesus’ disciples were known as Christians, they were known as “those who belong to the Way”—all the way to John, our elusive fourth gospel writer—who even remembers Jesus saying, “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,*” meaning the Way I live—how I walk, talk, love, move and have my being in the world is the truest way to be alive—to follow Jesus in the Way is the heart of the gospel message. It is to live in his love and to share that love.

New Testament Scholar Matt Skinner points out, “In Mark, Bartimaeus is not the first person seeking a miracle who approaches Jesus in faith, but he is the only one who winds up following him... After ten chapters full of so much

secrecy, confusion, and misunderstanding [by the disciples], Bartimaeus shows Mark’s readers that faith in Jesus remains possible and potent. Without Bartimaeus, and others in Mark like him who tenaciously cling to Jesus out of faith born from their urgent needs,”<sup>2</sup> and from their seasons of suffering, how would any of us have the vision to see that faith in Jesus matters?

Because the disciples just don’t get it, but Bartimaeus does. Living on the margins gives him a closeness to Christ that living at the center cannot provide. Isn’t that curious?

Calvary, our dreams and vision for the future could easily be limited by what we know and remember about our past, and by what we see before us in our present, and by what is true to our own personal experience—*unless!*—we invite and include Bartimaeus to show us something about faith that we cannot see on our own.

The story of Bartimaeus teaches us is that if **sight** is about what our eyes can see, **vision** is about what our faith reveals, what we

<sup>2</sup> Matt Skinner, “Commentary on Mark 10:46-52,” *The Working Preacher* (25 Oct. 2009), accessed on Oct. 27, 2024 at

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-30-2/commentary-on-mark-1046-52-2>.

may not yet be able to see with our own eyes. Vision comes from the voices on the margins, AND from our own marginal experiences of suffering, loneliness, exclusion, hurt. In other words, Vision does not come easily, it is revealed through struggle and not just any singularity of experience of story.

If we see things as Bartimaeus does, then our Vision is what will compel us to cry out to Jesus for Hope, even when those around us try to shut us up or shut us out.

If we see things as Bartimaeus does, then our Vision is what will compel us to jump up and throw off the cloak of all we've known in the past, to trust that God is calling us to something in our future beyond what we can see in the present.

If we see things as Bartimaeus does, then our Vision is what will compel us to follow Jesus in HIS way, and not just continue along the way that seems easiest or most well-worn or comfortable.

Because let's be honest. Most of us aren't Bartimaeus, at least not most of the time. We're the faithful disciples with good

intentions but who are confused nonetheless, who just can't see fully what God wants us to see; we're the people who sometimes want the Bartimaeus' of society to keep quiet, or at least not get in our way. We're folks who think we're doing God's will by protecting Jesus from people in "God's house" who might distract him from where he's going, when the reality is, the only place Jesus ever cares about going IS *to* the people—the people on the margins, the outskirts, the people who are in need, the people suffering, the people whose voices we don't listen to, the ones our country has cast out and cast away, the ones whose eyes we never meet, whose lives we look past unless they inconvenience our own.

Jesus' Vision is the kin-dom of God, so to follow in *his way*, is to see, listen to, hear, and heed the voices of the people that seem, to us, like they get in the way. But in fact, the next time someone seems to you like they are "in your way"—consider they might just be Bartimaeus leading you all the way to THE WAY, *to Jesus*.

If our memories are our roots, then the fruit we will bear in the future are our dreams—and they



only grow with the nourishment of Vision...seeing what we cannot see on our own. Our Vision must include what Bartimaeus' sees.

And if YOU are Bartimaeus, then hear this: we need you! Your voice, your gifts, your presence, your giving matters. Every person, every gift matters.

So let's end where we began, shall we? With "*We shall see, we shall see...said the blind man to his deaf son...*" Well, you know what? Bring on the blind and bring in the deaf, because at Calvary we don't see people for what they lack; we see people as their full selves and for how their uniqueness and gifts reflect the image of God. In fact, I think for us in the story, the two most important words are the pronoun WE and the verb SHALL. Vision is COLLECTIVE (we) and it's FUTURE-ORIENTED (shall).

It's this collective, future-oriented vision of inclusivity and welcome that inspire Damon and I to give generously to Calvary—above a tithe in fact. We give because we want all the Bartimaeus' of the world to be welcome here and to know and experience God's love, because at different points in

our lives, we've been Bartimaeus, drawn in and loved on by a community during our time of need...shown the radical love of Christ with question or judgment or pity.

Calvary, may we like Bartimaeus, allow our memories to lead us to a faith that takes us from Sight to Vision. May we remember how far God has brought us; may we dream about where God is leading us. May we re-gain our sight and follow Jesus' on *his way*, in 2025 and beyond.

And just as Bartimaeus called out to Jesus, through crowds and obstacles with urgency, may we not wait for when it's convenient or easy to give, may we not wait to give until we think we know what the future holds— may we give as an act of faith that will create the very Vision that we have yet to dream, but that lives in God's imagination.

And as we remember and dream and give—with our money, time, talent, and story—may we say together:

*"We—shall—see..."*

Amen.