

Sermon by Rev. Martha Shiverick
25 October 2009
11:00 a.m. Worship Service
Fairmount Presbyterian Church
Cleveland Heights, Ohio
“Regaining our Sight”
Text: Mark 10:46-52

The other day I was driving to work down Gates Mills Blvd. and noticed a trash can that had been set out on the tree lawn for the weekly trash pick up. The reason it called my attention is that sticking out of the can was a pair of crutches. I've never owned crutches as I have never had a need for them, but I do know people who have them and I don't think they are the type of thing that gets thrown away for the weekly trash when you are healed of your injury or what ever reason you needed them. No, I think that they are probably put away in people's closets in case they ever need them again. But, whoever threw out these crutches, knew that they were not going to need them any more. They had been healed! The crutches had been tossed away. As I looked at them, I thought about those faith healings that you see on TV. 'Stand up and walk!', the TV Evangelist yells at the believer. Throw away those crutches as the power of God and Prayer will heal you! And, I thought about the healings in the Bible. People were healed of blindness, healed of illnesses and were made whole and healthy by the power of their faith in God and Jesus Christ. So, as I drove on to work, I allowed my imagination to create the story of the owner of those tossed away crutches being healed and tossing them in the trash as a statement of his or her wholeness and healing from God.

And although we might laugh at methods of the TV healers, we know that we believe in the power of faith and prayer to heal. Weekly we submit our prayer requests and pray that others feel God's presence, that others are healed by God's Spirit, and that we might be transformed through prayer to do god's work and ministry on earth. We believe in the healing power of God and that our faith and our petitions to God through prayer are heard and have a power to transform. Perhaps that is why this morning's Gospel lesson from Mark sits well with us. It is one of Jesus' healing miracles, the healing of Blind Bartimaeus.

The passage is found right before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Louise preached last week from the text immediately before this one and told us how at this point, Jesus has foretold his death to his followers three times. He is now preparing to enter Jerusalem knowing that these are his final days. On the way, he is accosted and shouted to by a blind man wishing to be healed. Listen now for the word of the lord as it is written in Mark 10:46-52.

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting beside the

roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he 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 his way.

The Word of the Lord. Praise be to God.

If I was to ask you who were Christ's disciples, you would most likely name the twelve disciples or the women that followed him. But as the passage I just read points out, the list is much larger than the twelve. You see, this passage from Mark is indeed one of the healing stories of Jesus, but it is also a story of a man that is called into following Jesus right at the end of his ministry just like his disciples were in the beginning of his ministry.

Bartimaeus is a blind man who happens to be sitting by the side of the road when he learns that Jesus is about to walk by. He must have heard of Jesus and the stories of his healing as even though he is not a part of the crowd traveling with Jesus, he knows that this man can help him. This man who is the Son of David can restore his sight and cure his illness. As Jesus walks by he cries out to Jesus even though he has a less than perfect perception of who Jesus is. But he did scream out and then refused to be silenced even when the crowds tried to silence him. He refused to be silent, in fact he just screamed louder as he knew what he wanted and he had faith that Jesus would grant it to him. In this way the healing of Bartimaeus is different from the other healing in Mark. Jesus did not use saliva and dirt to cure him or even touch him. Bartimaeus is healed because of his faith. There is a direct correlation between his faith and the healing. It is Bartimaeus' faith that makes him well, it is his faith that has saved him.

There are three things which intrigue me about this passage. First is Jesus' initial response of asking what the man wants, then his response that it is Bartimaeus' faith that has healed him, and finally that immediately after being healed, Bartimaeus follows Jesus on his way.

The first thing that I wanted to point out which I was amazed that the writers of the commentaries did not mention was Jesus' initial response to Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus asks to be healed and Jesus asks him from what does he want to be healed. Perhaps Jesus' mother had given him the same lecture I have given my husband when we were first married and about which I still remind him. I told him that I didn't care if a woman had a distended belly the size of a champion watermelon and she was screaming at him that the pains were coming every five

minutes and she needed to get to a hospital.... Even then he should never under any circumstance assume that she is pregnant.

So Jesus asks the blind man he wants him to do for him. Was it that Jesus was just being polite or is it that Jesus sees us differently that we see our selves? Bartimaeus saw himself as a blind man that needed sight and Jesus did not see him that way. But it couldn't be that Jesus did not see the disability. My guess is that what Jesus saw above all else was a man who had great faith. Jesus said that Bartimaeus' faith had made him well. The blindness was secondary to the fact that Bartimaeus had the belief that Jesus was the son of David, the messiah that was prophesized in the Scriptures. Jesus says, "what is it that you want me to do for you.' Was Jesus just polite, or is it that he perceived what needed to be fixed in much different way than we do. Maybe, our handicaps are not God's. God's concern is with our faith. However, I also can not help think that this also says a lot to us about what Christian mission work should be. Perhaps we should not worry so much about creating the miracles and solving all the people's problems to the way we think they should be, perhaps instead of going everywhere with our preconceived ideas of what needs to be fixed we should first ask the question that Jesus did, "What is it that you want me to do for you?' Maybe the miracle the other wants is different that what we think it is or that we think it should be. Jesus, teaches us here to remember not to put our own agenda and set of standards on the other,

The second message one can glean from this passage is that the story demonstrates the power Jesus has to awaken faith in people. The major emphasis is on the man and his faith. The real story isn't the miracle; it is the call to discipleship. Bartimaeus spontaneously leaps up and abandons his cloak when called by Jesus. This response sounds a lot like the calling of other disciples earlier in the Gospel when they drop what they are doing and follow him. They drop their fishing nets; they leave their homes, that immediately spring up to follow Jesus on the way. Bartimaeus becomes the poster child for the kind of faith it takes to be healed. He calls out that Jesus is the merciful son of man and asks Jesus to have mercy on him. This is our cry to Christ as well and our faith tells us like it did Bartimaeus that God's mercy is always present.

The healing of Bartimaeus is especially significant for those who sit outside the church. As an outsider, his faith is still strong, and it is his faith that restored him and caused Jesus to call him to follow. The healing of Bartimaeus is testimony to the power of Jesus to restore (make well, save) those who know they are blind. His eager persistence in calling out and his actually springing up to come to Jesus when called serve as a model to us for our faith. The story isn't a typical miracle story. It is more of a witness to Jesus Christ and a call to follow him.

My best friend from college is a top athlete. Even now in middle age, she is an incredible runner and is invited to do such races around the country like the Hawaiian Ironman each year. The Hawaii Ironman is the toughest of the races.

You start with a 2.4 mile swim, then get out of the ocean and ride a bicycle for 112 miles. After that you leave your bike and run a full marathon of 26.2 miles. Personally, I can not imagine the wear and tear on your body as you do this race. And my friend did it two weeks ago with an injury to her knee. She finished and she said it wasn't pretty. And she emailed that when things got tough and she did not want to continue, she could actually feel the prayers of her family and friends pulling her along. She said it was the power of the prayers which got her through the race. She talked about it as a very spiritual experience. She finished the race in the dark surrounded by the starry Hawaiian sky and the prayers of those who supported her. Now my friend is a person of great faith, so it does not surprise me that if anyone would feel the prayers of support it would be her. Her faith is what got her through the race as she was open to feeling the prayers of all of us who were supporting her. Without faith in the m, she would not have felt them. And I feel that is the profound faith statement about Bartimaeus' healing as well. Jesus said it was his faith that healed him. And I agree. If he did not possess such faith that Jesus would save him, he would not have been healed at all.

It should come of no shock to us that healing, that regaining health as Bartimaeus did, is intricately linked to faith and to following Jesus. The story is more of a call to discipleship than a miracle. It is our faith that leads us to wholeness. But we people of faith know that this is true. Each person here can witness to a story of someone who has felt God's power in their lives. Families have survived hardships and say that they are stronger as they never felt abandoned by God, individuals have called on higher power to win their addictions, couples have found forgiveness and reconciliation by praying together, a wife who felt God's presence in the Hospice house room as she watches her husband die peacefully. All these people can witness to the miracle of God's close presence. All these people felt the miracle of God's love. All these people witness the miracle out of their faith. But remember, just as Bartimaeus knew the correct response to Jesus' healing was to follow him on the way, our response is to follow where he leads as well.

Healing changes you. Wholeness means a lifetime of service to God. In that way, we are all challenged this morning to seek a life like Bartimaeus. Amen.