

Sermon October 28, 2012 "Fix Me, Jesus" Mark 10:46-52 Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Jesus asked the blind man, Bartimaeus, "What is it you want me to do for you?" Remember last week, James and John had wanted Jesus to give them the seats of privilege in the coming kingdom. Jesus told them that they didn't understand what they were asking...They were blind to what his suffering and death, his coming as a servant who would lay down his life for the sake of all people, was all about. But today, there was a blind man who wanted to see.

As I mentioned last week, this section of the Gospel of Mark is sort of a "Blind-man-being-healed 'sandwich.'" It starts out in Mark 8:22-26 with one blind man being healed as Jesus applied mud made from Jesus' own spittle. Then, as the disciples walked along the road toward Jerusalem with Jesus, three times Jesus tried to tell them that he would have to suffer and die when they got there. In today's lesson, just fifteen or so miles away from Jerusalem, with the disciples still competing for the best seats and still apparently unable to see what Jesus was trying to get them to understand, blind Bartimaeus called out to Jesus, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Calling Jesus "Son of David" was the same as calling him "Messiah." This means that the blind beggar on the side of the road became the first person, besides a few demons and then Peter up on the mountain, to see that Jesus was God's Messiah, the Anointed One.

The crowd tried to shut Bartimaeus up when he called out to Jesus. But Bartimaeus called again, refusing to be thwarted. When Jesus heard him, Jesus told him to come to him. This apparently shocked the crowd, who said, "Hey, man, get up! He's calling you!"

Imagine, a beggar, blind. No Social Security disability checks, no seeing eye dogs, so the only way he could survive was to sit on the road and beg for people to give him something. Day in, day out, that was who he was and what he did.

When this man Jesus told Bartimaeus to come to him, Bartimaeus didn't just get up. He threw off his cloak, which in that day was his protection, and went fully to this one who represented to Bartimaeus his only hope for real life.

"What do you want me to do for you, Bartimaeus?" The same question Jesus had earlier asked James and John. But Bartimaeus asked for something Jesus could do: I want to see. Fix my eyes, please.

The ironic thing is that Bartimaeus in his blindness was already seeing a lot more clearly than the disciples who Jesus was and what Jesus was about. There was no need for mud or spittle for this healing. Jesus simply spoke a word: Bartimaeus, your faith has made you well. Go on your way. Instantly, Bartimaeus could see. And he saw more than what his eyes could register, for he chose to walk on the way with Jesus to Jerusalem. He became a follower, a disciple.

Restoration comes in various forms. In the book of Job, we read the "happy end of the story,"

where Job's life, which had been totally ravaged, was repaired to the point of overflowing with blessings again....

“What do you want me to do for you, Job?” I wonder if God asked him this, too, and if so, if what Job received was what he asked for?

What about us, today? How are we doing in terms of “blindness” as those who claim that we are following Jesus? Have we let ourselves see that God has a real claim on our lives? Have we understood that if we are followers of Jesus, we really are here to *serve*? Do we dare SEE what serving in Christ's name might mean in our day? Have we asked Jesus to “fix” our hearts where we have trouble loving others or trusting God?

A story: Years ago, Jim, an elder at a church, was in charge of reaching out to new people who moved into the neighborhood. Sun Lee and his family were Vietnamese refugees who had recently arrived in the USA. They had no possessions, knew no one in the area, and needed help in every way. Jim began by helping them to get food and then spent much time finding Sun Lee, who had been a professional diamond cutter in Vietnam, a good job. Jim wanted so much to tell Sun Lee about Jesus Christ, but he did not know much Vietnamese and the refugees knew very little English. Both men sought to learn the other's language so that they could become better friends.

One day, Jim felt that he knew enough of Sun Lee's language to try to tell him about Jesus. He began to try to explain about God to Sun Lee, but the more he talked, the more confusing it seemed to get. Finally, Sun Lee blurted out: “Is your God like you? If he is like you, I want to know him!”

In his living, in sharing love with Sun Lee, Jim had communicated to him what the love of Jesus looks like. (Adapted from *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, edited by Michael P. Green, p. 398)

Over the years I have been part of several Disciple Bible study classes. In one session a neat illustration was given concerning repentance and really letting God have a part in one's life. It went sort of like this: Repentance, turning to God for restoration, is like I am in New York and I am supposed to go to Maryland, but I get on I-95 North and find myself approaching New Haven. When I realize it, I tell God, “Gee, I am sorry, God, I have made a mistake, please forgive me,” but I keep on driving towards Boston. That's not true repentance. That's not letting God have power in your life. True repentance is action, turning around from the mistake and driving back towards Maryland. God's forgiveness gives us the power and help to do so.

Blind Bartimaeus was healed of his physical blindness. But he had already seen who Jesus was: his hope for life. When Jesus called him, Bartimaeus was moved to action: he jumped up, threw off the protection of his former life, and stepped forward to receive whatever this Jesus would give him. Then he chose to walk the hard road with Jesus, to Jerusalem.

The last part of this sermon will be a rather strange story I found in a book by storyteller Michael

Williams, which he included as a “Retelling” of today’s gospel lesson. It’s really not a re-telling, but even so it has stuck with me enough to convince me that it may also speak to you. So here it is:

Betty stopped washing the breakfast dishes and turned down the radio. Did she hear something? She leaned forward and looked out the window over the sink. Standing on her front stoop was a man holding a bouquet of balloons. Betty stared and muttered to herself, “What in the world?” As the man reached for the doorbell, she thought he looked familiar. Did she know him? He looked like...could it be?...That guy from the clearinghouse sweepstakes! It had to be!!

Betty ran to the front door and threw it open. “Did I win? Aren’t you the man from TV?” she squealed. The man smiled and said, “Betty, don’t you recognize me?” Betty’s hand flew to her mouth. The answer came from her heart, not her head. She heard herself say, “God?” As soon as the name was out of her mouth she knew it was true. God said, “Yes, Betty. I am here to give you something. Tell me, what would you like from me?”

Betty was stunned. She said, “What do I want from you? I thought I was supposed to want whatever you wanted me to want.” God chuckled and said, “Well, that works too. But let’s try something new. Just for today, what can I do for you?”

Betty wrapped her arms around her body to hold herself up. What did she want? From God? Anything at all? She shifted her weight and said, “I don’t know. I know what Jimmy would want. He’d say, ‘Honey, choose money. Get enough money so I can retire. Get enough so we can buy a boat, maybe an RV. And enough so we can spend winters in Florida.’”

God asked, “So that’s what you want? Money?” Betty said quickly, “No. No. That isn’t what I really want. Wait...let me think.” Betty started to chew on her nails. God waited. Then she said, “I don’t know. I know what I used to want. When I was young I wanted to be a famous movie star. I wanted to go live in California and wear fancy clothes. I sing a little, you know.” She looked up into God’s kind eyes. “Oh, I guess you do know.”

God smiled. He said, “So you want to be a famous movie star? That’s what you want from me?” “No. Wait.... Wait.” Betty started to sweat. She stammered, “I don’t know what I want. I know what I should want. I should want my children to be safe and healthy. I should want them to find partners to love and to give us lots of grandchildren...And I do want that. But...”

“So you want health and happiness for your children. Is that what you’re asking for?” God said. “Yes. No. I mean, yes, it’s what I want, but it’s not what I want. I mean what I want for me. I mean... I don’t know what I mean.” Betty started to cry. A deep sob shook her body and she clung to the screen door for support.

God reached out and touched her shoulder. “It’s OK, Betty. I tell you what, why don’t we go inside and have a cup of tea. We’ll sit together while you figure out what you really want.” (*The Storyteller’s Companion to the Bible*, volume 9, pp. 133-135, story by Pam McGrath)

What would we ask Jesus to fix? What do we want? What does God see that we do not see? What do we need to be restored, so that we can walk on the way with the One who calls our name, Jesus Christ? What do we need, so that we, by our living, will help others to see what God is like? By the grace of our God, may we dare to see, ask, and, acting in faith, follow. Amen.

Job 42:1-17 The Book of Job is the agonizing story of Job, a man faithful to God, who was allowed to suffer and lose everything in his life, his family, his health, his status, everything. Throughout the book, “friends” tried to get him to confess his sins, because they could not believe that Job had not by some sin brought disaster upon himself.

Today’s lesson, Chapter 42, is the “happy ending,” where Job admits that he has tried to fathom the unfathomable God...and now we see those “friends” punished and Job restored.....

42:1 Then Job answered the LORD:

2 "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

3 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

4 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.'

5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;

6 therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

7 *After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.*

8 *Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has done."*

9 *So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.*

10 And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

11 Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring.

12 The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys.

13 He also had seven sons and three daughters.

14 He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch.

15 In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers.

16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations.

17 And Job died, old and full of days.