

Let Me See Again

Mark 10:46-52

Slide: nephew Ben

About a year ago, my nephew Ben fell to the ground convulsing with what is known as a Grand Mal Seizure. Later it had been determined that he was likely having seizures for years but because he is autistic and nonverbal, and also what in the medical sciences also call “low functioning” or low on the spectrum, it was not at all obvious that he was having them until he had the Grand Mal Seizure.

After a year of hospitalizations, genetic testing, dead ends, and all sorts of waiting while watching Ben not being able to communicate what was wrong to his loved ones, they still don't know what type of epilepsy he has or if it even is treatable.

And, the danger of this disease that is taking over his brain and body is becoming more and more apparent as nothing can be done but more tests, hope, patience and prayer not to mention several treatment options that have not worked at all. He is only 13 years old.

I have been praying. You have been praying along our prayer chain here. My mother's church has been praying. Prayer and faith are not the things lacking in this time of trial for my nephew and my family.

Slide: Bartimeus

I share this story out of the ambivalence but also the reverence of this powerful Gospel reading for today. I both love and hate healing stories from scripture.

Perhaps you don't feel ambivalent or sometimes perturbed about the beautiful and deeply tangible miracles that we find Jesus doing as he journeys on the way to the cross.

Perhaps you do wonder about physical healing like me and how it doesn't happen. Perhaps you have longed for physical healing and received it. If so, thanks be to God.

However, many of you and many I encounter as a pastor never receive the physical healing they desire while also living a faithful life. I have been at the bedsides of many who asked why they will not be healed. Surely we are not unfaithful if we are not physically healed. What is unfaithful is trying to cover up thinking about why we aren't. Even Job complained when he suffered. Why can't we also do the same and call it faithful?

But like many contemporary Christians, I can often struggle just as any thinking human can, with the New Testament's healing stories, what their purposes were. Now, what's wonderful still is that I believe them. I don't distrust that they didn't happen. I don't gloss over them as metaphors or merely as little miracle vignettes that Jesus did to show us who he

was although they are those things, too.

I don't always leap first to the metaphor of these healing stories. On the other hand, I'm also not always sure what to *DO* about these stories either when standing here in the pulpit. I don't doubt the scriptures when they say that Jesus did heal the blind, the deaf, the lame and the demon possessed.

But, my 21st century brain doesn't like to have to metaphor them to death either. What I mean by that is that to look at these healing stories as if they are simply spiritual in nature, meaning that Bartimeus must have truly seen Jesus while being blind; well, that's wonderful but it softens the miracle that this man was physically made able to see again. I think that takes away from the intricate and detailed full healing Bartimaeus encountered and also that the person who healed him was as he proclaimed him to be – the "Son of David".

So, as if to explain away the you or I or Ben may be spiritually healed but not physically healed and that when we today ask for physical healing and don't receive it just must mean that we aren't seeing where the healing is, well I think that is not doing justice to this story.

And, to allude to an even worse untruth that somehow a person must not be faithful enough when they do not receive physical healing, how do you tell a 13 year old autistic low functioning boy that his faith will make him well? It doesn't work because it can't. And, actually, I think it's too much of an easy out because nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus say "no" to anyone who asks for healing - not anyone.

Slide: Have mercy on me

Therefore, let's tarry just a bit on the physical healing story of Bartimeus. It's a drama worth telling. It's one of the most famous healing stories in scripture. This blind beggar on the street known as Bartimaeus, which by the way

is a Greek name that means "one that can see" is suddenly aware that Jesus is passing by.

There must be a crowd there for as he cries loudly a very political statement of the day "Jesus, Son of David, Have mercy on me" he is hushed. He's told to stop. Perhaps the crowd doesn't want to call attention to the Roman authorities that very political title signifying Jesus as Messiah and King - Son of David!

They tell him not to make a fuss. They continue to desire that Bartimeus be kept in his place. Don't be so dividing Bartimeus! Know your place! Don't do that, you might call attention to us! Don't be so uppity! In a way, his friends, family, community wants him to continue to be blind, to be unseen as they were used to him being. Don't bother the status quo, no don't do it!

But that just makes Bartimeus more desirous to ask for mercy. Clearly he knows who Jesus is something that even the disciples didn't

yet fully realize – Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah, the Son of God. That makes him yell even louder.

Then, Jesus stands still. Imagine this. Jesus stops dead in his tracks. He is still. He hears the cry for mercy. Then, he calls Bartimeus to come. Even more physical drama ensues as Bartimeus, who cannot see, throws off his cloak and likely stumbles towards Jesus.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

“Let me see again.”

Immediately Bartimeus can see again. Then, he follows Jesus along the way.

It’s such a layered story in just a few verses. Was he healed because he knew who Jesus was and that is the faith to which Jesus alludes? Was he healed, made to be able to see again because as a blind man, he could “see” and believe that Jesus could heal him? Or, was he healed because he asked Jesus for mercy, for he wanted simply

to see again? Or, lastly, was he healed because Jesus simply wanted to give him what he asked for?

Slide: Kyrie Eleison

There is so much to unpack in this powerful healing of Bartimeus. But, for me today, the word mercy sticks out the most. We began our worship asking for it. In fact, what we call the Kyrie, when we sing “Lord have mercy”, it’s directly from this scripture right here. That’s where the tradition to sing this comes from. We ask God routinely for mercy, to have God look upon us with mercy to give us what we need. And, some days we are not unlike Bartimeus, crying for it by a roadside.

And the response that Jesus has is he stands still. He hears. And, he asks, “What do you want me to do for you?” Notice that Jesus didn’t presume that Bartimeus would ask to see again. Jesus asked him what do you want. And, Jesus invites us to do the same. He is still. He waits. And, then he asks us. I truly

think that God does this in our prayer life.

It is at once a lovely but also terrifying question. It calls for honesty with God. It means that we must trust that Jesus will hear us and have mercy. It means that we may need to ask over and over again for that mercy. And, it means that we participate in the relationship with Jesus, who is suddenly still along the way with us.

What is your desire that Jesus would ask of you? In what way do you long for mercy from God? We, all of us want healing of some kind or we desire it for another. And, although we may not receive the physical healing we desire, and although I cannot give the answers to this mystery of why healings happen or don't happen, it's clear that in this story from today that Jesus will continue to ask us for what we desire.

I know this because I never cease asking God to have mercy on Ben.

I know this because I continue for some reason in

faith to come to God for healing, as elusive as it may be.

I know this because Jesus stood still for Bartimeus when he cried for mercy.

Today, Jesus stands still now for us, for you, for me. In the compassion of Jesus, he will not stop asking, "What do you want me to do for you?"

And, in our need, as followers along the way with Jesus, we continue to say, "Let me see again."

Amen.