

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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October 24, 2021

Mark 10:46-52

Tell me, how many of you wear glasses or contact lenses? What would it be like if there were no glasses anywhere in the world? No contact lenses at all? You would not be able to see.

Bartimaeus in the gospel lesson for today cannot see. If he had family to help him, he may have been able to stay home with his relatives, perhaps do something in the household. As it was, he sat by the side of the road, unable to do anything but beg, helpless. He would have the braying of donkeys and the syllables of half-heard conversations. He would have smelled the occasional goat and the press of rain before a storm. He would have tasted the dust on a dry day.

And he would have felt apart from life, separated from community. People would have passed him by as if he did not exist. He would have felt powerless, unable to see.

Do you ever feel that way? Whether we can see with our eyes or not, sometimes I think we feel separated from other people, from God. Whether we live in a mansion or in a shack, we can feel helpless. Whether we have a top-level job or not, we can feel like we just can't see the presence of God, the beauty of life, the love of Jesus. Everything tastes like dust.

This story in our gospel lesson for today concludes the section of the Gospel of Mark that we have been reading for the last few weeks, in which Jesus is travelling to Jerusalem, to the cross, where he will save the world. Three times, Jesus tells his followers what it means for him to be the Messiah, the Savior. That he will be

rejected by the chief priests and the elders, that he will be killed and on the third day rise. Three times the disciples fail to see, or choose not to see.

The first time, Peter thinks Jesus is possessed by a demon. The second time, the disciples don't even hear Jesus, but instead argue about who is the greatest. The third time, James and John come up to Jesus and ask to be at his right hand and left when he comes into his glory.

The disciples think Jesus the Messiah is a Messiah of glory riding to Jerusalem to take over. This is the human way of thinking, the path of glory.

What does Bartimaeus think? Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is coming, and he cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy." Jesus' followers try to keep Bartimaeus away. They tell him to be quiet, probably because Jesus is too important to bother with a nobody like Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. But Bartimaeus keeps on crying out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy."

This messiah is not a messiah of glory, but a messiah of mercy. This is God's way of thinking, the journey of the cross.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want," Just like he asked James and John what they wanted last week. Last week, James and John wanted to bask in Jesus's reflected glory. This week, instead of glory, Bartimaeus says, "I want to see."

James and John and the other disciples have physical eyes to see physical light. But they don't see with their souls. Bartimaeus can't see physical light with physical eyes. But he sees with his soul: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy."

I think we are a little like Bartimaeus. We have heard a rumor, that Jesus will be passing along this way, this road sometime about now. That in his place, St. John Lutheran Church, on this weblink at this time, Sunday Morning, somehow Jesus might be present. So we come from our roadsides, our blindnesses, and we cry out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy. Jesus, we would like to see."

Friday was a bit of a long day for me. Not really bad. Just, it started at 8:30, which is not early at all for many of you, but it went twelve hours till 8:30 again. Started with a pastor's meeting. I led the Synod Racial Justice Team. Now some of you all have led meetings here at church and elsewhere, and you know how difficult it can

be to keep people focused, on task, to decide on the concrete, specific steps we need to take to meet our goals.

Well, try doing that with a bunch of pastors, who have such great ideas and so effectively step back and suggest that we re-think the basic assumptions of our questions and so on. Honestly, it's like herding cats.

Then I attended the Kentucky Council of Churches Assembly online. And it was fine. Now, I would not have attended the Kentucky Council of Churches Assembly online if the Bishop hadn't asked me to. But the bishop did, so I attended online. That lasted until one.

Then I helped someone who needed help. Usually that's a positive experience but sometimes it is annoying and depressing.

Finally, it was seven-thirty P.M. and I was tired and hungry and we were waiting at the airport for Gul Zardan and Sharman Attal, from Afghanistan to arrive. Plane was a little late, so we waited. Waited a little longer. Evidently, they got off the plane but no one told them where to go from the gate. Finally, they showed up. Upstanding, beautiful men in their thirties, curly dark hair, bright brown eyes, their families still back in Afghanistan. Will have to think about that at some point. They were exhausted. Maha Kolko, herself a refugee from Syria who works with Kentucky Refugee Ministries, introduced us to them and said we were from St. John and we were sponsoring them for three months. They were very thankful. But the word "Very" is not the word for it. Deeply, profoundly, eternally thankful.

And then I saw. I saw the presence of God in their exhausted eyes. I saw Jesus. And it didn't matter any more that I was tired, or that it had been a long day or anything like that. I had seen.

"Son of David, have mercy. Jesus, please, wish to see." Thanks be to God.