

Pastor's Message – 10/27/24  
Mark 10:46-52

“What do you want me to do for you?” asks Jesus when they are standing face to face (v. 51).

That's an intriguing question, don't you think? Bar Timaeus is a beggar, so he could've asked for a bag of gold. He's got no status in the community, so he could've asked for the respect of others. He's unemployed, so he could've asked for a job. He's made his mistakes in life, so he could've asked for forgiveness.

“What do you want me to do for you?” is the question that Jesus puts before him. It's open-ended. Non-directive. A blank check, just waiting to be filled in.

Mark is quite interesting in our Bible reading today. A blind man “sees” or recognizes Jesus as the “the Son of David,” which is a messianic term. The blind man is able to identify Jesus as the Messiah. That's a Messianic claim: “the son of David.” He can't see Jesus, but he knows who Jesus is.

“What do you want me to do for you?” By asking this question, Jesus is doing more than gathering information. The question itself is part of the man's healing. Answering the question helps Bar Timaeus get in touch with what he wants and needs the most.

The story also raises significant questions. Who is actually blind in this story? Who is acting like a beggar? How does the healing Jesus offers affect not only the physical condition of Bar Timaeus, but what Bar Timaeus becomes? Bar Timaeus is aware of Jesus's presence, even though he cannot see him.

What of this story in the tenth chapter of Mark? Is this a story about physical blindness, or is there more to it? The Scripture tells us that as Jesus and his disciples, and the crowd of people were leaving the town of Jericho, they came upon a *blind* beggar by the name of Bar Timaeus sitting by the roadside. It appears that the story is about a physical condition. Later in the story, it seems fairly clear that the act of healing that took place is of a physical nature. That is, the Scripture plainly says that Bar Timaeus, who had been blind, regained his ability to see.

But the question remains, in spite of this evidence, whether or not Jesus's healing of this blind man was simply a miracle story about a physical healing of a physical ailment, or whether it was some other kind of blindness that the gospel writer Mark had in mind. My sense is that even though a physical healing has taken place, the physical healing in this story

is not as important as the healing of spiritual blindness. The issue for us is not whether Jesus could miraculously cure people's bodies so much as whether Christ can miraculously heal our souls.

There are all kinds of blindness. We could interpret this story literally - a physically blind man sought out Jesus, believed that Jesus could make him physically able to see again, and Jesus healed him. But as I reflect on this story, I think about other kinds of blindness besides the physical kind -- blindness that most of us can relate to.

That reminds me of a story that I read and would like to share with you – a story called **Asking For an Answer**.

Mary noticed the man sitting in the back pew of the empty church. He was slumped over with his head down and hadn't moved since the worship service ended. Mary picked up service bulletins and straightened hymn books in the pews and then slowly made her way to the back of the church. The man paid no attention to her, so she cleared her throat.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

His eyes had dark circles around them and were tinged with red.

"Fine, thank you."

"Sorry if this seems rude," she said. "But you don't look fine."

He gave her a tired smile. "Things have been rough lately."

"I'm sorry to hear that." She sat next to him. "Our pastor is a really good listener. He helped me through a difficult time in my life. Did you want me to get him?"

"No, thank you," the man said. "He preached a fine sermon, and I suspect he is a good man, but I came here looking for something I didn't find."

"Oh." Mary didn't know what else to say so she sat quietly for a few moments. Then she took a deep breath. "Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Sure," the man replied.

"If you didn't find what you were looking for why are you still here?"

"I don't know." The man's eyes filled with tears. "This was my last hope. I haven't been to church in years, but I remember my mother taking me. I thought maybe if I came to the service, I would find what I need."

"But you didn't in the service," Mary said.

"No, I didn't. I had hoped but..." The man shook his head and started to get up. "Anyway, thank you for asking. Everyone here was very kind and nice."

Mary took his offered hand. "You are welcome. Can I impose on you with one more question?"

"Sure."

"What were you looking for?"

The man shrugged. "Healing. Hope. A Fresh start. Something from God."

"And you didn't find it?"

"No. I listened to the prayers, the songs, the readings, and the sermon. I didn't find it." The man shook his head again. "I guess I should be going."

As he started down the aisle with his shoulders hunched over Mary felt a feeling of despair wash over her. This wasn't the way things were supposed to happen in church. People were supposed to come, and God was supposed to answer. Then something about what the man said struck her.

"Did you ask?" she said before he reached the door.

The man stopped and turned around. "Pardon?"

"Did you ask God for help? You told me you listened and paid attention, but you didn't say anything about taking part in the worship."

Mary took a deep breath. "Did you pray about what you needed?"

"I came here, isn't that enough? I mean I don't mean to be rude in a church, but God is supposed to know everything so how come God can't just give me what I need?"

"But what is it that you need?" Mary asked. "What is it that you want God to do for you?"

Tears started to roll down the man's cheeks. "I don't want to be alone. I want to stop feeling that emptiness inside of me since my wife died. I want my life to be like it used to be when I looked forward to getting up each day instead of dreading every moment."

Mary walked over to him and offered him a tissue. He took it and wiped his eyes.

"You know there are widows and widowers here in the congregation," Mary said. "We sometimes get together for lunch. We talk and pray together. It helped me when Frank died."

"You're a widow?" the man said.

"I have been for two years."

"Does it still hurt?"

"Every day," Mary said. "We were married almost 45 years. I miss him so much my heart aches."

"Then you haven't found healing either."

"I didn't say that," Mary said.

"But you're still sad."

"Sure I am. I loved Frank with all my heart. But I know that one day I'll join him in heaven and on the days when it gets really bad, I ask God for help." Mary smiled at the man. "You remember when I said that the pastor helped me through a rough time?"

"That was when your husband died?"

"It was."

The man finished wiping his tears. "Can I ask you a question?" Mary laughed. "I think since I asked you three you certainly can ask me at least one."

"Do you think I could meet the pastor?"

"Absolutely," Mary said and together they walked toward the healing and wholeness that God intended for a man lost in pain and despair.

In the forty-second chapter of Isaiah, God said, "I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground" (Isaiah 42:16 NRSV). In that passage, God isn't talking about that small fraction of people who do not have the physical ability to see; rather, God is talking about all of God's people and something other than physical blindness.

We've been singing a song throughout worship today: a short refrain about our need and our longing for God. Blindness isn't necessarily about physical blindness because we all experience blindness of one kind or another in our lives. Losing our way, even temporarily, is a kind of blindness. Losing our way, being out of touch with God, is a time when our souls cry out for God, cry out for a Savior who can heal us and bring us back to Him – offering grace all the way.

"What do you want me to do for you?" If Jesus were suddenly here, right in front of us, asking that question, what would be our answer? "Master, I want to see!"

*Open our eyes Lord  
We want to see Jesus,  
To reach out and touch Him  
And say that we love Him.*

*Open our ears Lord  
And help us to listen,  
Open our eyes Lord  
We want to see Jesus.*

Seeing Jesus, touching Jesus, knowing Jesus is the answer to the blindness in our souls. Seeing Jesus, touching Jesus, knowing Jesus is the only way to satisfy the longing in our souls for healing and grace.