

Mark 10:46-52 (28-10-12)

A traveller in the desert awoke hungry in the night. Lighting a candle he began eating dates from a bowl beside his bed. Taking a bite from one he saw a worm in it and threw it away. Biting into a second date, he found another worm, and threw that away too. Reasoning he wouldn't have any dates left to eat soon, he blew the candle out and ate the rest quickly! Some people prefer darkness and denial to the light of reality.

Today's reading is about more than physical blindness or Jesus' healing power. Bartimaeus was someone who was *physically* blind but could see *spiritually* and this was in contrast to the disciples.

Since declaring His Messiahship to the disciples Jesus has been making His way towards Jerusalem and the cross, consistently teaching them about His impending death and resurrection.

They didn't understand and had been both blind and deaf despite the many miracles giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. He had reiterated several times the cost of being His disciple but they didn't understand that either. Bartimaeus is the last person to respond to Jesus before Jerusalem.

A detailed study of miraculous healing stories in Mark shows they generally follow a pattern that this one doesn't fit. If you studied stories of Jesus calling disciples to follow Him, you'd find it fits better with them, being not just a story about healing a blind man, but about people needing their SPIRITUAL eyes opened to follow Jesus on the way of the cross.

Bartimaeus was a beggar. His name, Bar-timaeus, means Son of Timaeus. Usually only young boys were known by the reference to their father. A grown man still being known that way indicates his status as a nobody. Even worse, Bar-timaeus also means "son of the unclean." He has no pretensions to power, wealth, glory, or privilege. His dream is to see again but his aim is survival, sitting by the roadside, coat spread-out in front, begging coins from pilgrims on their

way to Jerusalem.

But, when Jesus comes by, Bartimaeus suddenly “sees” what the others can’t. For the first time in Mark’s gospel he publicly uses a title associated with the expected Messiah, calling out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Peter had called Jesus “Messiah”, but he’d seen only in part. ‘Nobody Bar-Timaeus “sees” and identifies ‘Jesus Bar-David’!

The people try to shut him up, echoing the disciples’ attempts to shoo off the children. Bartimaeus shouts louder and Jesus stops and “calls” him. He jumps up and runs to Jesus leaving his coat behind.

The coat, probably his sole possession was certainly his livelihood, spread out to receive coins thrown to him. Whereas the rich man couldn’t give up his belongings to follow Jesus, Bartimaeus does it instantly. No walking off downcast for him!

Jesus asks, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* Exactly the same question he'd recently asked James and John when they'd come asking a favour. How different the answer!

James and John wanted privilege, status, prestige, glory. Bartimaeus asks to “see”. How much did Jesus long for his disciples to want to “see”. What James and John wanted was not within Jesus’ power to grant. What Bartimaeus wants is something Jesus can give.

Bartimaeus is commended for his faith, given his sight and, reminiscent of the discipleship stories rather than the healing stories, he “follows Jesus on the way” to the cross. In contrast to previous stories about the disciples Mark portrays Bartimaeus as the ideal disciple.

“What do you want me to do for you?” asked Jesus.

How would you answer that question if Jesus asked it of you today? What do you want from God? In the story, the crowd didn’t expect much from Jesus for the beggar.

But the beggar expected something BIG from Jesus - a miracle. A total transformation of his life as he knew it. What are you expecting from Jesus? What are we expecting as a church?

Sometimes we don't expect much? But, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we should gradually be becoming more and more like Jesus. What do you expect of *yourself*? What do we expect of each other as Christian disciples? Or, as Jesus put it to Bartimaeus, "*What do you want me to do for you?*"

For Bartimaeus, it was transformation from a nobody, wholly dependent of the charity of others, into a person with gifts of his own to share. Bartimaeus fully believed that to be in the presence of Christ was to be in the presence of a spiritual power fully capable of transforming him. The old really COULD pass away and new really CAN come!

The possibility of our transformation is a *requirement* of our faith, it's what it's all about. When we come to God, we HAVE to change. We are no longer the person we used to be.

Selfishness? Consumerism? Bitterness? Anger? Being judgmental? The tendency of thinking that the only life that really counts is ours. These things all must go. We can't be a Christian and remain as we are, we must change.

When asked how we can know if we're really alive in Christ, St Paul said we should ask ourselves: "*Am I becoming more and more like Jesus?*"

The church only becomes the church when it's filled by ordinary people like us who bit-by-bit are taking on the personality and character of Christ. So what are the expectations before us as members of Christ's church? Of the very many, here's but a few:

Firstly, there should be an expectation that all of our members will become softer, gentler, more loving people whose mission in life is the healing of others.

There's a lot of heartache in this world. Lots of injury, tragedy, and what broken, bruised people need is not indifference, not preaching or easy answers to life's most difficult questions. What people need is the presence of love in their lives. Love, according to St Paul, is patient and kind,

it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things: love never gives up. Love should be present working in the background to bring about healing over time. Every member of our church should become more loving.

Secondly, we must be more welcoming and accepting of others, especially those not like us. We must leave judgment behind and learn to relate to others as Jesus did. He befriended everyone, ate with them and valued the meaning of their lives. It's the only way we'll ever be able to help others see Jesus. We must expect members of our church will open their arms in love to everyone.

Thirdly, we should expect to become younger even as we grow older! Psalm 92 says:
"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green..."

We might look like a gnarled old Walnut tree on the outside, but the Bible promises there's plenty of green wood in us yet! We need to discover it so that old dogs can learn new tricks, and ancient forests can still grow. Let's make that an expectation of ourselves that every one of us will grow younger even while growing older!

Finally, we're expected to be joyful. I'm not talking about happiness, the emotion we feel when things are good. Joy is an inner confidence and strength that says, *"Even though my world has fallen apart, I know that God cares about me, and will rescue me."*
Joy is the ability to find God's beauty in life even when ugliness seems to rule the day.

Psalm 126 tells of great joy as the Israelites return from exile in Babylon. They expect great hardship returning to a land that's been decimated. They will need to build and, not only sow but, worse, wait for harvest. But their joy can't be contained as they wait on God's continuing care. God gives his children the gift of quiet, hopeful joy through His faithfulness to us even in the face of hurts and tears.

God expects us to change like this! How in the world are people like us going to become more loving, accepting, younger, and full of joy?

Like this: Jesus finds us sitting - calling out for help. He hears our voice, comes to us and says: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Like the blind beggar, we must speak the truth:

"Lord, I want to become more loving."

"I want to become more welcoming."

"I want to become younger in my old age."

"I want to find joy in the midst of my tears."

Or maybe there's something else on your heart? Jesus replies "Go, your faith has made you well."

Bartimaeus had faith that he could be changed.

Are you a 'Bartimaeus' or a 'date-eater'?

Bartimaeus got up from where he sat in weakness. Bartimaeus gave up everything to follow Jesus along the road to life. His cloak, his only possession, his garment, beggars mat, tent when it rained, and his warmth in cold weather.

The "Rich Young Ruler," was unwilling to sell everything to follow, Bartimaeus was willing to give everything. The Twelve Apostles left their businesses and careers to follow Christ.

Open your eyes, come, see. Are you willing to do the same?