

The Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

Mark 10:46-52

October 24, 2021

“What do you want me to do for you?”
Mk 10:51.

Seeing Again

Dear brothers and sisters: grace to you and peace

from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus

Christ. Amen.



It took some weeks of persuasion before they would go and speak with someone. The grown-up son was desperate to get his ailing and depressed mother into some kind of an institutionalized care home where she would be properly cared for and would no longer be a danger to herself and to others. As long as she lived with him he couldn't do his own work and have any kind of private life. She swamped him with demands for help and attention. Something had to give. So the son convinced his mother to seek the advice of their pastor. She was skeptical. But together they looked at several options. Small homes, large ones, assisted living, skilled nursing. Any of them would have been real possibilities. The mother, though, saw a fatal flaw in each one. None of them would do. After an hour or so of this increasingly fruitless conversation the mother turned to the son with a triumphant gleam in

her eye and said, “See, I told you! He can’t do anything for us!” Of course the truth is that she didn’t want anyone to do anything for her. She wanted to go on being the victim, to go on putting pressure on everyone to feel sorry for her, but unwilling to accept help.

Jesus’ question to the blind beggar Bartimaeus addresses this same possibility. “What do you want me to do for you?”¹ The answer to that question springs directly from what you think about Jesus, who He is, and what He is able to do, and what you want Him to do. For example many people would answer that what they want from Jesus is a new law giver. They want Jesus to give them the answer to the question, “how can I be a good person?” in the hope that by fulfilling that expectation they can get the heavenly “brownie points” that will get them in good standing with God. Witness last week’s text where we hear of the rich young man who comes to Jesus seeking the answer to the question “who can be saved?” in terms of works righteousness and earthly merit. Witness the history of the Christian Church in the Middle Ages where Christ is viewed more often than not as a terrible judge, a new Moses who comes bearing another set of commandments. The Gospel message of the unmerited forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ is very hard to hear for those who think they can earn a place in God’s favour. Surely there must be something I can do? And to be sure, there are places in the Gospels where Jesus sets forth the Law of God very clearly. Love God. Love others as you love yourself. But these things aren’t new, they are what God has always commanded, and they are part and parcel the same Laws that you break, every day, if you are honest with yourself, because of “sinful passions, aroused by the law...at work in [your] members to bear fruit for death.”² So for those looking for Jesus to be a new lawgiver you end up in the same

1 Mk 10:51.

2 Ro 7:5.

place, that the forgiveness of sins is obtained by merit, that your justification before a holy and righteous God is based on human reason and effort. In this way of thinking there is no difference between the righteousness of the Pharisees and that of a Christian. In this way of thinking the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross is of no use, and the Gospel is meaningless. Faced with this spiritual dead end it would be easy to just say, “see, He can’t do anything for me.”

Another response to Jesus’ question “What do you want me to do for you?” is understood in how the disciples viewed the coming of the Messiah all throughout Jesus’ ministry. The disciples really struggled with Jesus. They really didn’t understand what He was all about. So time and time again they fall back on the things they would have known from the religious teachers of the day about who the Messiah would be, and what the world would be like when He arrived. What are those things? The usual: money, power, prestige, glory. In St. Mark’s telling James and John come to Jesus immediately after He has told them that the journey they are on to Jerusalem will result in His flogging and death and burial. “And after three days he will rise.”³ Right after Jesus says this here comes James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and apparently they have no idea what He was talking about, or they don’t care. For they come up to Jesus and say, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” So Jesus asks them the same question He asks of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar who sits on the road which leads to Jerusalem. “What do you want me to do for you?”⁴ They say, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”⁵ Those are the places of power and

3 Mk 10:34.

4 Mk 10:35–36.

5 Mk 10:37.

prestige. That's where you want to be if the Messiah is coming to establish an earthly kingdom. Just like those who are seeking Jesus as the new Lawgiver, many look to Jesus to fix all our injustices and evils, to fix the culture and make everything better in the here and now. They look to Jesus as the key to power and prestige, money and influence. And again, just like the idea of Jesus as the new Moses, this answer to question "What do you want me to do for you?" completely misses the message of the cross.

So let us turn our attention to the blind beggar on the side of the road, Bartimaeus. This man is sitting there on the side of the road because there are lots of people going by on their way to Jerusalem, just like Jesus and disciples. He is sitting there in the hopes of collecting some money, because he is blind and cannot earn a living any other way. But then he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is coming by where he sits, and he shows that he is a man of courage, and a man of faith. He launches himself into the crowd, crying out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"⁶ He recognizes who Jesus is, the Son of David, the Messiah who has come to usher in the Kingdom of God. And he clearly believes that Jesus can help him. He is right, for Jesus indeed sends for Bartimaeus, and they come to him with this message: Take heart! Cheer up! Jesus is here! He is calling for you, come and find Him! And so now that same question of Jesus to Bartimaeus is the offer of grace and mercy he has been waiting for his whole life. "What do you want me to do for you, Bartimaeus? Do you want to give up begging? Do you want to live differently, to be able to work for living and not have to whine at all the passers-by?" Bartimaeus will not let this chance slip by. He wants to see Jesus, and not only that, he wants to follow Jesus. "Rabbi, let me recover my sight."⁷

⁶ Mk 10:47.

⁷ Mk 10:51.

And so Jesus restores the sight of the blind man, just as Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years earlier: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.”⁸ The same question is before us this morning: what do you want Jesus to do for you? Are you looking for a Messiah in the mold that the world wants? Are you looking for another teacher with a five point plan for how to live a good life? Let us take away from this miracle more than just the awesome display of Jesus’s power, but that in restoring sight to the blind Jesus demonstrates that He has come to open the eyes of everyone, to see Him for who He really is, the One who has come to lay down His life in order that all would be saved. This is what we are looking for. This is why we gather today. The journey of faith is like moving from darkness to light, from being blinded spiritually in sin to beholding the risen Christ in His glory. Jesus brings the Kingdom of God, where “the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”⁹ Such are the signs of this Kingdom, not a new set of rules to follow, not the power and prestige that the world seeks after, but sight, and healing, and the Good News of salvation preached unto sinners.

And so having restored the blind beggar Bartimaeus to sight Jesus says, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.”¹⁰ That’s the key: faith. Faith is what moved Bartimaeus to get up, to cast off his beggar’s cloak and receive the new cloak of righteousness from our Lord. This is faith that dares to grasp hold of the promises of Christ – the very forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life – and does not let go. The same faith puts Bartimaeus on the road to

8 Is 35:5.

9 Mt 11:5.

10 Mk 10:52.

follow Jesus. Now he is a disciple, and he was obviously known the early church because St. Mark knows his name. No doubt he will witness the coming events of Good Friday in Jerusalem. What a great and moving story we have in this Gospel of this poor man who seeks and finds faith, healing and salvation. We too are traveling on the way with Jesus, who has given us the sight of faith, and salvation. By the Holy Spirit we are able to see Him as Lord and Redeemer. By Holy Baptism we have cast off our spiritual blindness and now we have our cloak of righteousness. Therefore until this road reaches its final destination, when we are raised to spend eternity in His presence in that New Jerusalem, let us walk with Him. Call out to Jesus, and when He summons you cast aside your sins in repentance and faith, and once again receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament. And as we walk, let us always remember those who are still begging in their blindness. Let us not disregard those who still exist on the side of path, who long to have their sight restored, who need to hear the Gospel Good News. Amen. And now the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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✠ Soli Deo Gloria