

## Bartimaeus's Vision and Ours

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Our Gospel story today is the final healing miracle in Mark's Gospel: Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, comes to Jesus, and Jesus restores his sight, Jesus makes his vision happen. And what I find especially remarkable about this last miracle in Mark is the way Jesus makes Bartimaeus an active participant in his own healing, the way Jesus empowers Bartimaeus to take an active role in his own salvation.

At the beginning of the story Bartimaeus is sitting in his accustomed place, by the side of the road, outside of Jericho, listening as the travelers go back and forth. He hears a crowd coming, and when someone nearby mentions the crowd is for Jesus the famous healer, he begins to shout at the top of his lungs "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." And despite the crowd's best attempts to shut him up, Jesus hears Bartimaeus's cry, and Jesus calls Bartimaeus to him. And hearing that call, Bartimaeus springs up, and throws off his cloak—which he had spread out in front of him to collect the coins of his begging, so throwing off the cloak means throwing away his entire day's proceeds; in fact, it means throwing off his whole life as a beggar—he throws off his cloak and comes to stand before Jesus. Already, just by calling him, Jesus has opened up the space for Bartimaeus to take an active role in the mercy he wishes to receive.

Then Jesus calls Bartimaeus to take an even more active role. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks. Now on one level that seems like a perfectly silly question. What Bartimaeus wants is obvious: he's *blind*; he's a *beggar*; he wants not to be that anymore. It would be easy enough for Jesus to acknowledge the obvious and say "I have mercy. You can see." But that would leave Bartimaeus, in a way, out of the loop; that would make Bartimaeus merely passive, with no way of engaging his own active self in becoming the whole person he wants to be. So Jesus gets Bartimaeus involved: by asking "What do you want me to do for you?", Jesus is opening up the space for Bartimaeus to come into relationship with Jesus, to be open and honest and forthright with Jesus, to put his one greatest desire on the line for Jesus, risking and hoping and trusting that Jesus will accept him and his greatest desire as they are. That disarmingly simple question, "What do you want me to do for you?", is a summons to Bartimaeus to take a personally active role in envisioning and naming the future he wants to become real. And Bartimaeus answers the summons: "My teacher, let me see again," he says; and Jesus responds "Go; your faith has made you well." Jesus reveals that Bartimaeus's own active faith has been a constituent factor in his healing, that God's grace and Bartimaeus's faith together have made Bartimaeus well. The miracle is accomplished; Bartimaeus's vision happens; and what makes the miracle remarkable is the way Jesus empowers Bartimaeus to be an active participant in his own salvation.

And on that level this story speaks to us about much more than just a healing miracle, as wonderful as the healing miracles is. On that level this story speaks to us about *discipleship*, about how, if we want to follow Jesus on the Way as Bartimaeus does, then we also must spring up and throw off our cloak when Jesus calls; we also must name before Jesus the future we envision, the future we want to become real; we also must trust that Jesus will accept us and our greatest desires as we are; we also must let our faith make us active participants in our own salvation.

And for us at Trinity Church, one of the ways we can participate in salvation is during this fall Pledge Drive. Now, I'm not suggesting that the activity of giving money to the church *buys* us salvation; overcoming that idea was one of the driving forces behind the Reformation—which, as it happens, many of our Protestant brothers and sisters are observing today as Reformation Sunday—and I do not propose we go back to those pre-Reformation bad old days today. But I do think that giving money to support the work of the church is part of our discipleship, and it is one of the ways we can be active participants in the process by which God makes us more whole, more free, more visionary, more ministering, more Christly people. The church is the community that shares God's mission; as we give time and talent and treasure to the church we are caught up into God's mission too; and being caught up into God's mission

means being active participants in the saving grace God seeks to send out to all the world. Pledging is part of discipleship, and discipleship is active participation in salvation.

In the story, Jesus summoned Bartimaeus to be an active participant by naming out loud the future he wanted to become real. How would we at Trinity Church name the future we want to become real here? How would we envision the congregation we believe God is calling and empowering us to be? I think this is a good time for us to be asking that question. I have been your rector for just over a year now. When you called me, you made it clear that one of the things you were looking for in a rector was someone who would respect and maintain the best of Trinity's history and traditions. During this year, as we've moved through the getting-acquainted, getting-to-know-you phase of our new pastoral relationship, I have grown more familiar with your history and traditions, and I've come to value them deeply. I've also begun to see some places where I think those traditions can grow, where we can take the best of what we've been so far, and reach out to become even more what God wants us to be.

- We bring a remarkable degree of beauty, in music and art and devotion, to our worship here; how can we share that beauty with even more people, more attendance on Sunday mornings, more opportunities other than Sundays for people to worship together?
- You have been asking for more Bible study, and since Shelby has joined the staff we've been able to add two more gatherings for learning about our sacred texts. What more might we be able to do to help raise the level of biblical literacy in our congregation, even in our community? Author Diana Butler Bass has written about how churches a lot like ours have found a new level of life and energy in something so simple as reading and thinking about the Bible together, how engaging the Word has helped people become excited and activated about doing Christly work in and through their church. What would it be like for Trinity to have ten, fifteen, Bible study groups engaging that living Word together?
- Many people have told me they think our Christian Education program at Trinity is very strong. But it is also true that patterns of church attendance are changing in our culture, and many families these days find it difficult to come to church *every* Sunday, and that makes participation in Sunday School kind of problematic. Shelby and I and some of the Christian Ed leaders have begun to work on a few ideas about that. And we ask, what more might we do to make Christian Education and Formation a better fit with families' real lives?
- We have a stunningly beautiful church building, and a historic churchyard, and a parish house that lets us offer hospitality, lets us exercise a *ministry of space*, to all sorts of activities and community groups. Sometimes maintaining such historic buildings can be quite a challenge. How many more generations of people will be able to share that hospitality if we now do the work of discipleship to maintain and improve the buildings and grounds that previous generations of Trinitarians have bequeathed to us?

These are just some of the elements of how we envision our future here at Trinity, how we name what it is we want Jesus to do for us. By thinking and envisioning and naming together the future we seek, we become active participants with Christ in making that future real. By identifying the resources we need, the staff and the budget and the funding it will take to make that future happen, we spring up and throw off our cloak and put ourselves on the line before Jesus. And by responding to this Pledge Drive, by giving time and talent and treasure to the work of the church at Trinity, we act out the faith by which Christ makes us as a congregation whole.

Jesus called Bartimaeus to be an active participant in his own salvation, and Bartimaeus had the faith to answer that call, faith to let his work and God's work work together to make his vision happen. The good news for us today is that we can have the faith to do that too. Let it be so for us. Amen.