10-27/28-18 Rev. Amy Haines

Mark 10:46-52 Dwell in Faith Dwellings Series

When I was a child, my grandmother created many of Jen and my Halloween costumes. One year we were a witch and an angel. One year we were both owls. And then there was the year I dressed up as Clara Barton. I think I had to do a first person monologue in school, so simply used the same costume for Halloween.

As that memory fades in and out, however, I must confess that sometimes I say I dressed up as Clara Barton, and sometimes I say I dressed up as Florence Nightingale. Have you ever gotten two people confused like that? Both were nurses. Both dealt with physical healing. Yet Ms. Barton was a nurse during the Civil War, and is credited with forming the American Red Cross.

Ms. Nightingale was a nurse in the Crimean War, and assisted with healing war blindness by also overcoming cultural blindness that refused to see the problem of poor health care.

Blindness happens in many ways. In the late 1700s Jakob Albrecht was a Lutheran who, like many of his fellow mainline Christians, went through the motions of faith until an epidemic killed several of his children and one of the local United Brethren preachers offered at the funeral services the comfort of God through a more personal faith in Jesus. This led Mr. Albrecht to a Methodist class meeting and the saving grace of God. Then it led him to become a local preacher to his fellow “spiritually blind” German-speaking immigrants to open their eyes as his had been opened.

You might better know Mr. Albrecht as the founder of the Evangelical Association that later merged to become the EUB, then even later became the UMC.

--umcdiscipleship.org 10-28-12

Sometimes our blindness is physical. Sometimes our blindness is cultural.

And sometimes our blindness is spiritual.

The classic hymn “Amazing Grace” proclaims,

“I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see.”

Today our scripture story reminds us that we are not called to dwell in spiritual blindness, but to dwell in faith. And when we dwell in faith, the eyes of our hearts will be opened. We will begin to see the world as God sees, to love as God loves, to offer grace as we have received grace, to dwell in God as God seeks to dwell in us. And when we seek to dwell in God, then we are called to renew our commitment to follow God’s Son Jesus on the journey of discipleship.

Today in our scripture story an unlikely character teaches us about this journey of discipleship.

Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was a blind beggar. Unlike today when many blind men and women lead fairly independent lives, in the time of Jesus, those who were blind, deaf, crippled, or lame were all considered social outcasts and people of little worth.

There was not a social welfare system in place to care for a blind man. Bartimaeus would have been abandoned by his family who wondered what sin he or his parents had committed to cause his blindness. Bartimaeus’ life would have been reduced to begging for a few coins to help him survive each day, if he was lucky enough and healthy enough to beg.

As a blind beggar, Bartimaeus lived on the outskirts of Jericho, a small town located on the Dead Sea, at the base of the Jordan River. Jericho was the final stop before travelers began the trek through desert wilderness into Jerusalem.

Although Bartimaeus was a social outcast, a sinner in the eyes of many, except God, he made up for his blindness by listening to the stories of the travelers who passed him by. For months he had been listening to stories of this new rabbi way up in rural Galilee, a new rabbi named Jesus who taught with authority, challenged the religious leaders, welcomed sinners, and even healed those others shunned.

Suddenly, one day as Jericho was filled with travelers heading to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, Bartimaeus realized the tone of the travelers had changed. Someone unusual was in their midst. Could it be? It was! That new rabbi from Nazareth was passing through town, along with this disciples and close followers.

When Bartimaeus realized Jesus was beginning to pass him by, instead of crying out for alms, for a few coins on which to live, Bartimaeus changed his cry to a cry for new life:

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Bartimaeus was shouting at the top of his lungs, shouting out to Jesus over the roar of the crowd. He had nothing to lose and through faith, everything to gain.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

“Imagine in DC one of the homeless people who beg at the entrances to the Metro [train stations] interrupting a presidential motorcade! That is the picture Mark has painted,”

pastor Sharon Ringe proclaims. “The on-lookers respond like the Secret Service by trying to silence him.”

--Sharon Ringe, wesleysem.edu, 7-28-02

The crowd around Bartimaeus didn’t care for the cry of this crazy blind beggar. Some were surprised at his boldness; some were annoyed at his audacity, and maybe a few were even frightened by the claim of faith in his cry.

“Shush, crazy beggar. The teacher’s not going to have anything to do with the likes of you.”

“Forget it, old man. Stop ruining our travels with your crazy words.”

“Son of David? You fool, Rome’s going to come after us if you keep yelling out with words like that.”

Yet Bartimaeus cried out all the more.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Only three times in the gospel of Mark is Jesus referred to as the Son of David, the Messianic hope of a Savior for Israel. Two out of those three times come from the mouth of this blind beggar Bartimaeus. The third time is when Jesus explains the Messiah to the scribes in the Temple.

Up until now, Jesus has kept secret his identity as the Son of God or the Son of David. But now Jesus is heading into Jerusalem, the city of David, knowing that his journey will end on the road to the cross. The next story in the Gospel of Mark begins that journey with what we call Palm Sunday, Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It would be understandable if Jesus ignored Bartimaeus and kept his face set on Jerusalem.

Have you ever been so focused on what you were setting out to do that you missed everyone and everything else around you? Have you ever lived as if you have blinders on?

Yesterday on our way home from a soccer game in Trenton, we traveled on the southern edge of AK Steel, or what I still call Armco. Timothy was exclaiming at the size of the building. I was recalling when we could drive that and see the glow of the white-hot steel. Ken, however, was looking out at the field across from AK, and suddenly cried out, “Look, three deer!” How often do we get focused on the things of man and miss the wonder of God’s creation?

How often do we see children around us as a nuisance rather than a blessing? Are we open to taking the time to welcome the children? Having been here now through three classes of Bright Beginnings children, it is not unusual for me to be at the playground or the park or even the grocery and suddenly realize a little hand is waving at me. Then they tug on their parent’s arm and exclaim, “Look, it’s Pastor Amy!” If I am focused on what I am doing there, I may miss the joy on that little one’s face.

Jesus was focused on Jerusalem. Yet, he still hears and acknowledges Bartimaeus’ cry of faith.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Bartimaeus cries.

“Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’”

Even though Jesus is journeying to his death, Jesus stops to care for one of God’s beloved children. Jesus stops to affirm the worth of even a blind social outcast. Jesus stops to offer grace.

Such a simple gesture, to stop and offer Bartimaeus the grace of listening to his cry, transformed the crowd observing such an exchange.

Where once they silenced Bartimaeus, now they encouraged him to get up and go to Jesus.

“Take heart; get up; Jesus is calling you.”

How do we as the church today help others to hear the voice of Jesus calling out to them?

How do we listen to those to cry out for mercy and grace?

Yes, we must confess that at times we have been part of the crowd seeking to silence the voice of the vulnerable. We have been part of the crowd not listening to the voices that make us uncomfortable. We have been part of the crowd that were worked up to cry out for Jesus’ crucifixion.

So how can we also listen to Jesus’ words as an invitation to grace for our lives today?

When Bartimaeus realized that Jesus had stopped and was calling him near,

the gospel proclaims,

“So THROWING off his cloak, he SPRANG up and CAME to Jesus.”

Do you notice the action in that verse?

“So THROWING off his cloak, he SPRANG up and CAME to Jesus.”

Bartimaeus is not timid or calm or passive about his faith, his cry or his response to Jesus.

As Pastor Susan Andrews describes Bart’s faith, it is “needy, eager, assertive, hopeful,

impetuous, persistent, risky, raw and relational.”

-adapted, Susan Andrews, Day1.net, 10-26-03

Have anyone ever used one of those words to describe your faith in Jesus?

Bartimaeus threw his whole self into his call and response to Jesus, and in so doing, he also left his cloak behind. That cloak could have been his only possession. It was his beggar’s mat that collected the coins thrown his way; it was his garment, his warmth in cold weather, and his tent when it rained.

Like the fishermen disciples who left their families and nets to follow Jesus, Bartimaeus left his beggars cloak behind. “Bartimaeus was willing to forsake all in order to follow Jesus.”

-adapted and quoted from Bob Allred, bobsermons.com, 10-26-03

What is it we need to leave behind in order to follow Jesus?

Blind Bartimaeus came to Jesus. And Jesus asked him,

“What do you want me to do for you?”

Jesus did not presume to know what Bartimaeus wanted from him. Jesus still does not presume to answer for us or to seek to tell us the level of our faith.

When Bartimaeus responded to Jesus, he responded with confidence and trust, not asking for money or fame or forgiveness, but asking for healing.

“Teacher, let me see again.”

“Teacher, let me see again.”

That word again struck me anew this week. Bartimaeus’ words imply that at one time in his life, he could see. He could remember what people and colors and sunshine looked like. He could remember what it meant to be a meaningful contributor to society. He could remember what it meant to be a part of the community of faith.

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

Bartimaeus responded with confident faith, “Teacher, let me see again.”

And Jesus responded, “Go; your faith has made you well.”

Notice Jesus did not touch Bartimaeus; Jesus did not say anything about healing Bartimaeus.

Like many whom Jesus healed, they were healed not by touch but by faith, as they came by faith and responded with faith.

Jesus responded, “Go; your faith has made you well.”

And immediately Bartimaeus regained his physical sight.

And immediately Bartimaeus chose to follow Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus is a wonderful healing story to complete Jesus’ ministry journey in the Gospel of Mark. Yet his story is also so much more, about how to dwell in faith on the journey of discipleship.

As a blind beggar, Bartimaeus lived by faith each day that others would take pity on him and throw a few coins his way. Yet when Bartimaeus began to listen to the stories of Jesus, he began to believe in this one whom he had never physically seen. Then, when the opportunity came for Bartimaeus to come in contact with Jesus, Bartimaeus was eager to turn his belief into action.

Bartimaeus lived out what Jesus proclaimed to the disciples following his resurrection:

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (John 20:29)

Bartimaeus had a spiritual insight that many in the Gospel of Mark did not have. How many times did the disciples not see or understand who Jesus is? Peter didn’t understand Jesus saying he must die on a cross, even after Jesus’ third passion prediction. In the passage just previous to today’s Scripture story James and John had requested seats of honor in the glory of Jesus’ kingdom. They didn’t understand Jesus’ kingdom was based in compassion and servanthood

rather than power and riches.

How many times do we struggle to dwell in faith because we are uncertain who Jesus really is,

or uncertain what it might take for us to be faithful followers of Jesus, or uncertain about how faith may transform our lives?

As Karen Jones once wrote,

“Faith requires persistence: continued belief even when belief seems irrational.

Faith requires courage: courage to go against the crowd,

to follow your own path, to face a new way of living.

Faith requires trust: trust that God can heal and that you can be made whole.”

-URD ‘03 p. 310

Today Bartimaeus encourages us on our journey of following Jesus. Bartimaeus encourages us to dwell in faith, even when faith requires persistence, courage and trust.

When was the last time you cried out, “Jesus Christ, have mercy on me?”

In the Russian Orthodox church, that cry is part of every worship service as part of the communion liturgy.What would happen if we prayed that Jesus Prayer daily?

“Kyrie eleison. Christ have mercy on me.”

Maybe it would remind us of God’s amazing grace.

When was the last time you threw off your cloak, letting go of whatever held you back, or stepped out in faith even when you could only see the next step, trusting God to guide you?

Maybe such a step would remind us that the Holy Spirit seeks to guide us. And that whatever we face in life, God is there with us.

When was the last time you renewed your commitment to follow Jesus? Bartimaeus didn’t have it all together. He was a social outcast. Yet he was welcome to follow Jesus. No matter who we are, where we come from, and what we continue to struggle with in life, all of us are called to follow Jesus on the road of discipleship, to learn from him and share him with others.

To be healed and to heal. To be loved and to love. To be opened to new life, for this world and the next.

I remember when new life was opened to me in 6th grade. I got my first pair of glasses. And could suddenly see the chalkboard from the back and the front of the room. Trees suddenly had individual leaves on them, and not just a clump of color. I could see clearly the people around me. And see myself clearly in the mirror, which wasn’t as exciting. It was as if I was seeing the world around me for the first time.

When we follow Jesus, when we dwell in faith, we are opened to a whole new world, through more than physical sight.

In the next month we will be reminded that when we choose to follow Jesus, not only are we called to dwell in faith, but also in hope, in confidence, in victory and in love.

May we follow in Bartimaeus’ bold footsteps.

May we share in his spiritual insight.

May we exhibit his passion for life.

May we dwell in faith, this day and for evermore.

Let us pray.