

# “See and Be Seen”

October 24, 2021  
Mark 10:46-52

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## **Mark 10:46-52 CEB** *Healing of blind Bartimaeus*

Jesus and his followers came into Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, together with his disciples and a sizable crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, Timaeus' son, was sitting beside the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!” Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, “Son of David, show me mercy!” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him forward.”

They called the blind man, “Be encouraged! Get up! He’s calling you.” Throwing his coat to the side, he jumped up and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said, “Teacher, I want to see.” Jesus said, “Go, your faith has healed you.” At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus on the way.

Jericho, the setting for our scripture reading, is in the West Bank of modern-day Palestine. It is thought to be the oldest continually-inhabited city in the world. Jericho is the city where the Israelites entered the Promised Land. It’s the city of Joshua — as in “Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho ... and the walls came-a tumblin’ down.” (You have to have grown up going to Sunday School in the 60’s or 70’s to know that one!) In the time of Jesus, Jericho was the location of Herod’s winter palace, and it was heavily occupied by the Romans. All of this to say, Jericho is a significant city— a city steeped in power and symbolism. Nevertheless, this story barely mentions the great city. The story that is told and remembered of Jesus’ time in Jericho is not about Jericho at all, but about a blind beggar he met on the side of the road outside of the city.

The blind beggar has a name: Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus literally means “son of Timaeus”. Whenever you see a name beginning with ‘bar’ in the Bible it means son of: Barabas, Barnabas — a bit like Johnson (John’s son) for us. Timaeus means defiled or unclean, so Bartimaeus literally means ‘son of the defiled one’. This guy is not just outside the city, on the side of the road; he’s outside of civilized society. He has three strikes against him: he is blind, he has no money, and he has to beg on the streets to live. He is known as “unclean.” He’s not just poor, he is undesirable. It’s not just his name that gives us that idea. When he calls out to Jesus the people around him scold him and tell him to be quiet. Unlike the people who carry their friend to Jesus on a mat and break through a roof to lower their friend down for healing; no one is helping Bartimaeus get to Jesus. In

fact they seem to be doing all they can to block his path.

I want you imagine yourself in the place of Bartimaeus. You are used to not being able to see, but you are also used to not being seen. When you're sitting under a tree with a shopping cart and a dirty sleeping bag, asking for change, people walk by — quickly. It's uncomfortable walking by when you're not used to it, but I've lived in cities and sadly panhandlers get easier and easier to ignore. Jericho is big. There were many like Bartimaeus — truthfully, it's remarkable that someone knew his name. If you were Bartimaeus you would be used to being ignored, but for the sake of survival you would have to get people to look at you and see you. No one was going to hire you to work the fields or build a wall or bake bread and there is no ODSP or social safety net. All you had was your family — and if they didn't exist, or kicked you out, or abused you, or were on the streets like you, then your only hope was some stranger noticing you and having a shred of mercy.

Bartimaeus's life experience is pretty removed from most of ours. There are not many of you reading or listening who have been in his shoes ... though I know a few of you have been. But even if you are not legally blind, even if you have not spent time on the streets, my guess is every one of you has had a time in your life when you have felt unseen, when you did not feel valued or like you mattered, or when you felt like you didn't belong. Perhaps that's how you're feeling right now.

I want you to take a moment and meditate on a time when you felt some of what Bartimaeus might have felt like. Was there a time, maybe it's now, when you just wanted more mercy, to be valued to be loved? ...

There is a crowd of people and a lot of conversation and noise, but above it all Bartimaeus cries out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The people around him are annoyed, maybe embarrassed, and they try to keep him quiet. But he doesn't care or can't afford to care what people think of him and he shouts out again, louder: "Son of David, show me mercy!"

All of a sudden Jesus notices him and calls out to him to come.

The Son of David noticed the son of the defiled.

What must that have been like? Can you remember a time when you were seen? When someone let you know you mattered, you belonged?

I want you again to pause and while we listen to some music, go back into that memory of when you did not feel seen or did not feel you belonged. I want you ask Jesus to come into that memory. What does Jesus see in you and love about you? ...

How do we see people and allow them to feel seen? To be honest I'm still learning, but I think, slowly but surely, I am learning. A few weeks ago, we had someone who can be rough around the edges come to the church wanting help. The problem was the individual didn't really want to listen to possible solutions to the problem, and as solutions were offered the individual got frustrated and angry. Now I was listening and sympathizing but instead of offering solutions I should have offered prayer, and to think about it, and stayed on that level of listening and sympathizing. In fact, not long after, I listened to a podcast by Jennifer Kolari on the CALM technique.



(You can watch the YouTube version here <https://youtu.be/fppxgAnbED4> or Google "Jennifer Kolari how to deal with irrational people")

This is a technique that she used mostly with children but then realized that it works well for any upset person. I'm learning to practice it, and it does take practice.

**CALM** stands for:

- C**onnect
- A**ffect
- L**isten
- M**irror

**Connect:** put the phone down, position your body in a: "you've got my full attention" way.

**Affect:** show in your face some of the emotion the other person is feeling and expressing: sadness, anger, fear. You don't have to be feeling those emotions yourself, but it is a way of empathizing with and seeing their feelings.

**Listen:** really listen ... and that looks like paraphrasing and repeating back

what they are saying to you (you don't have to agree or disagree with them). Simply repeat back what they are saying.

**Mirror:** This entire process can be summarized with mirroring. Empathize, listen, don't try to fix or give solutions (especially not right away) but mirror with your words and a little with your expression what they are telling you.

Often people don't need you to fix the problem as much as they need you to see them, to let them know that they matter, that they have value and belong. The incident I mentioned earlier ended well, thanks to a worker from the Cooperative Care Center (CCC or former Warming Centre) who went outside and had a conversation with the individual where he did just that kind of thing, empathized with them and didn't try to fix it, and the tension de-escalated and dissolved immediately. They have some really skilled people working with the CCC.

By calling out to Bartimaeus and inviting him to come, in front of everyone, Jesus really sees him and lets him know without telling him that he matters. He matters to the Son of David; he matters to the Son of God. He is loved. It is then that Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants him to do for him. Bartimaeus answers that he wants to see. The irony is that Bartimaeus probably had better sight, spiritual sight, than most of the people around them. Jesus does heal his blindness — and with it Bartimaeus doesn't let Jesus out of his sight. He leaves Jericho and follows Jesus. We don't know more about Bartimaeus' story but I'd be willing to bet that with those healed eyes and a healed heart, Bartimaeus saw other people on the edge of the road and called out to them: "I see you and you matter."

Friends, I have compared Bartimaeus to homeless people in Brockville and in the cities. We are called to see these people and every person as real people with value. I know that not everyone is called to connect with people who have addiction and mental health issues. It isn't always easy. Thank God that so many are called to that. We hold them in prayer and we pray that more will be called, because the need is huge. But even simply saying hello — even if you can't or don't want to offer change— looking people in the eye and saying hello is small but it says 'You are a someone'. I believe we are all called to support in some way agencies who do make a difference and are able to reach 'hard to reach' people. This is why we opened our doors again to the CCC.

There are times when every person needs to be seen. I also believe that as Christians we are called to reach out and see those who are feeling lonely or overlooked. Perhaps that is a senior next door. Perhaps it is someone new to the church or the neighbourhood.

As you follow Jesus, may you know deep in your being that Jesus sees you *and* loves you. You are a child of God and precious in God's sight. Do you know that? Do you believe that? I pray you do.

May God heal your eyes that you might see others around you with new eyes — the eyes of Jesus.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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