

BE ENCOURAGED! GET UP! HE'S CALLING YOU!

Mark's Gospel is considered the oldest written around 60 AD, and Mark drew from eyewitness accounts of Peter. Today's story of the blind man is the last healing story in Mark's Gospel. We can look at this story as another healing of a blind man, because there are seven separate occasions when Jesus did the same thing. However, when you read these stories you discover that each one of the person or persons were healed in a different way.

What we need to do is look at this story of Bartimaeus and learn “what is God trying to tell us through the story?” “What can we use or apply to our own spiritual walk?” There are many verses in the Bible that instruct us to help one another in the body of Christ.

If we are going to be that “*caring family of disciples*”, then we must come together! Hear this – I don't care who you are or how many times you have been told -- you and I can't make it on our own!!! I will guarantee that if you look into the story of anyone that has been successful, you will find a person or people who were key in helping that person get to where they were successful. Young people when or if you have entered the work force you will wisely learn rather quickly that you don't know it all from books even though it cost you plenty, and to take in all the practical knowledge you can. Many of the most successful officers in the military who began as ninety-day wonders garnered wisdom from the old sergeants around them.

If we take a look at Jesus' life there were few times when He was alone. He was in community with His disciples and reaching out to people. The experts say ninety percent of the world's personalities are extroverts and ten percent introverts. It is much easier for those outgoing people to live in and deal with the world, but you know when we ask God to help us, He will, as promised, make us a person who better can deal with people and the world around us no matter who we are.

Here we see a blind man sitting, begging for coins. Passover is approaching and pilgrims are on their way to Jerusalem to observe it. On the way there is excitement with people in a festive mood, chanting as they head toward Jerusalem. Then there is another crowd of people along the road too sick, too poor or handicapped to make the trip to Jerusalem. Now out of this crowd comes the voice of Bartimaeus crying out “Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!”. The people in a festive mood tell him to hush, not to spoil the atmosphere. Bartimaeus continued to shout “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me”. Jesus, though sharply focused on His final days in

Jerusalem, hears the man's cries for mercy. Jesus tells the people to tell the man to come to Him.

How many times in our lives do we get “interrupted” or sidetracked by something or someone? What do we do about that sudden interruption? How do we handle it emotionally and physically? The crowd that was on their way to Jerusalem were ignoring those along the road and having a good old time. Are there people today we tend to ignore because they would “spoil” our good mood, our “party”?

There are many who need our help whether it be physically, emotionally, or spiritually. In our mission statement are the words “*make Christ known*”. How can we do that, follow the example of Christ and show people we care and that they matter? Are we occupied with such “important” things that we can turn our ears from the cries of those in need?

Jesus stopped and made the time to acknowledge the man and his pleas, despite being in His final days. **What are we doing with our days?** Last week I talked about self-serving service, is that how we are using our time for “old number one”? It is no wonder the church does not have the influence it once had in earlier times!

The church **was** the center of the community. Does the community even know we are here, unless it's a negative headline? In today's story with all that was going on – the crowds, pre-Passover celebrations, what was the center of things – it was Jesus they were following because of His teachings and miracles!

Since we are the “body of Christ” should we not be visible to our community? Look at Jesus' words “call him forward”. Then the people called the blind man, Bartimaeus with the words “be encouraged! Get up! He is calling you!” Bartimaeus threw off his coat, jumped up and came to Jesus.

Could we, the church, be that blind man that needs to remember to cry out for help over the noise of pride that says “we are doing a good job here”? Have we forgotten where our help comes from and instead believe we can do it in our own strength? **Is the church “blind” to its mission?** Are we content to “sit” there along side of the road and beg for something to happen? Are we content to say “that's just the way it is”? I say “no” we can always do more.

I believe strongly that just like in this story, Jesus will hear when we cry out, when we pray and he will call us to Him! He loves His church beyond any measure we can think of. **However, we, like**

the blind man, must jump up and go to Jesus. The actions of the blind man suggest to me that as some other translations say “he came at once to Jesus”. He didn’t say “well I am pretty comfortable sitting here” or “wait until I finish my lunch”.

God's grace is another thing we cannot measure by human standards, but it doesn't mean we should take advantage of it by giving God excuses every time he calls us. A German preacher, Eric Bonhoeffer called it “cheap grace”, knowing we have it and assuming we will receive it no matter what we do!

The blind man does one more thing that can be overlooked. In Verse 50 “*throwing his coat to the side*”. The blanket was used to gather the coins when begging. To me that act of the blind man can relate to the verses in Galatians and Colossians about throwing off the old rags or old self and putting on new, being clothed in Jesus Christ. Bartimaeus would no longer be the beggar, he was a “new” man. **If too, the blind man is us, the church, do we need to throw off that which is holding us back from following Jesus and what he has called us to do?**

The call is not complete until we by an act of our will go to Jesus. We can't go and follow if we feel like it today then tomorrow we don't!!! So many we read of in the Gospels were attracted to Jesus with the words, the miracles and the hope of a king to overthrow the Romans, but when He explained how the kingdom was to operate many left and followed Him no more. **We have to be the faithful. We must be the disciples that hear the words and be the doers.**

With so much need we cannot just sit on the side of the road and complain about the situations. Neither can we ignore when Jesus calls. There is a saying “*there's none so blind as those who will not listen.*”

Be on the alert for His call -- the blind man came to Jesus and Jesus asked Him the question in Verse 51 “*what do you want me to do for you?*” And the answer was simple - “*teacher, I want to see*”. **What question will you have for Jesus when he calls you to Him? Are you willing to “be encouraged, get up, and come to Jesus?”**

One of the ingredients of the stewardship campaign are the pieces of the puzzle. To complete the picture, the puzzle, we are all needed. No one is unimportant – young or old, long-time member or yet-to-become members. **We all are needed for the body of Christ to function and grow with Jesus Christ as our head.**

A couple of nights ago in a Bible study we talked about service and ministry, which in the Greek and Hebrew were one in the same word. I shared the thought that on Sunday morning even though we are giving thanks and praise to God for who He is and what He does for us, that going on at the same time is ministry by each and everyone with singing and prayer. **We are ministering to one another, but if we are not there, a piece of the centennial puzzle is missing.** We all know when there are more people here we sing out more and it lifts us all up in spirit. I wish you could all sit up front here and hear when voices are raised to God.

In Bartimaeus' answer is the difference between faith and ambition. **Faith asks for needs. Ambition for wants.** We only have to go back to last week's Gospel where John and James asked for seats in the kingdom. They were seeking, ambition, not a need. Jesus ignored the disciples request by telling them it was something He could not grant them. But in Bartimaeus' case Jesus granted it immediately. There also is implied that Bartimaeus is healed not only physically, but spiritually and lifted up as a human.

When Jesus calls, will we answer and what will we ask of him? `Examine your prayer life and look at what you are praying for, is it for a need or a want? Jesus has called each one of us to Him. He is there just like He was for Bartimaeus that day. He is close and when we cry out He hears us.

Finally, in Verse 52 Jesus declares Bartimaeus to *"go your way, your faith has made you well"* or as some versions say *"whole"*. The story ends with Bartimaeus receiving his sight and following Jesus. When Jesus hears our cries and answers, do we continue to follow Him faithfully or do we forget His faithfulness and go our own way until the next time we need Him, ignoring His call on us?

For 51 years Bob was blind. He couldn't see a thing. His world was a black hall of sounds and smells. He felt his way through five decades of darkness. And then, he could see. A skilled surgeon performed a complicated operation and, for the first time, Bob had sight. He found it overwhelming. "I never would have dreamed that yellow is so...yellow," he exclaimed. "I don't have the words. I am amazed by yellow. But red is my favorite color. I just can't believe red. I can see the shape of the moon--and I like nothing better than seeing a jet plane flying across the sky leaving a vapor trail, and of course, sunrises and sunsets. And at night I look at the stars in the sky and the flashing light. You could never know how wonderful everything is."

One of the hymns we sing is "Open my eyes Lord I want to see Jesus". We will, when we answer His call on our lives and have our spiritual eyes opened. The same can be said for the Body of Christ called Centennial. Amen.