

In the name of God, the creator, the redeemer, and the sustainer. Amen.

Jesus heals a blind man sitting on the side of the road. Seems like just another day in the life of our Lord and Savior, if you ask me. But it turns out that this story, the story of the healing of Bartimaeus, a beggar who called out for Jesus but was told to be quiet about it, is unlike any other story in Mark's gospel. And if we look at these details of the story close enough, we might see it, that is Bartimaeus and Jesus and us, in a fresh light.

So far in Mark's gospel story, the disciples and the people following Jesus spend most of their time confused about who Jesus is. Jesus calms a storm and the disciples say, "Who then is this, that even the wind in the sea obey Him?" They seem confused of what He's capable of.

Jesus performs miracle after miracle and the disciples still don't get it. After the feeding of the 5,000, they forget a loaf of bread for their journey, and they worry about it amongst each other. When Jesus says to them, "What are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not understand?" And they seem confused on why He's here.

The first time Jesus tells the disciples about His forthcoming crucifixion, Peter pulls him aside and tells Him to stop talking about that nonsense.

But this is not the case with Bartimaeus, who seems to know exactly who this Jesus figure is and what He's capable of, and maybe even why He's here.

The fact that Jesus sees Bartimaeus at all is a miracle in itself. The story takes place in Jericho, which is Jesus' last stop on his ministry tour right before He enters Jerusalem, and all eyes turn towards the crucifixion.

Jericho was a key stop for pilgrims who were on their way to Jerusalem, and especially at a time like now in the story, which was right before Passover. So, it was likely a madhouse on the day that Jesus walked past Bartimaeus.

Most people probably would walk right past Bartimaeus. He was, after all, a beggar close to the lowest of the pecking order in this society. The only thing worse would be someone would be to be someone's slave.

But also noteworthy about Bartimaeus is that most people who are healed in Mark's gospel don't have a name. They get described as, "the Syrophenician's daughter." They get claimed as, "the man with the withered hand." But not our friend Bartimaeus. He has a name.

One way to translate Bartimaeus is, "son of the honored." In another way is, "son of the unclean." Might it be both? Could he not be both invisible, broken, disempowered, outsider and also honored?

Is this not how Jesus sees each of us with all of our flaws and imperfections and says to us, "You, yes, you, just as you are, are My beloved. You are of high honor. You are worthy of love."?

It must have meant a great deal, then, to Bartimaeus, to be called forth, especially considering how many people told him to pipe down about the whole thing.

But the meat of the story here seems to be not just that Jesus sees and heals, but that blind Bartimaeus sees the real Jesus when others can't. It's not just that the disciples can't figure out who Jesus is, they don't get what He's about either. They argue about who is the greatest and who gets the best seat in the kingdom.

After he tells a young man to sell his possessions and give what he has to the poor, he leaves sad, because he has a lot of stuff. This is the exact opposite reaction than Bartimaeus, who, when it is called to Jesus throws off his cloak, literally the one and only thing he would own. He meets Jesus and the cloak is off in a heartbeat. Bartimaeus leaves everything right then and there and got on the way with Jesus.

The great irony in the story, then, is that the one who can't see, blind Bartimaeus, sees Jesus, really sees. Bartimaeus gets it. And the ones that we

expect to see are somehow blind. Jesus even says to His disciples, "Do you have eyes but fail to see?" Yes, they do. And so do we. So do I, all of the time.

And so I think because of this mutual seeing, that Jesus sees lonely, downcast, isolated Bartimaeus on the side of the road and calls him forth as a son of honor, and Bartimaeus sees the truth about Jesus, and the result of that mutual seeing is that Bartimaeus can't help but leave his cloak right there and join on the way.

After he's healed, Jesus tells Bartimaeus, "Go, for your faith has made you well," which is what Jesus tells a lot of people after he heals them. But Bartimaeus doesn't go. He follows. He joins Jesus on the road, or what Mark refers to in his gospel as "the way." And let's hope he was keeping up with his cardio, because the next stop is Jerusalem, which is 17 miles and 4,000 feet up. Bartimaeus goes, follows, all the way to the next scene in Mark's story, which is Jesus finding a donkey to ride into the city as a king. The beginning of the end.

I imagine Bartimaeus tagging along on this journey and the crowds of people who no doubt heard about this Jesus and were desperate for healing, who were sitting on the side of the road just like Bartimaeus was, just like we all are with our own blindness, and hoping that this Jesus guy is what we think He is. Hoping that He really can mend a broken relationship, hoping that He really can calm a storm, free us from the pain that we all know too well. Hoping that He can deliver us from our bondage. Hoping that He can soften even the hardest of hearts. Hoping that He can call us beloved just as we are, and give us eyes to see, to truly see.

I imagine Bartimaeus running ahead of Jesus along the way, all the way up, going to each open and broken heart on the side of the road and saying, "Don't worry, a king is on the way, and trust me, He'll see you." Amen.