

What Do You See?

Matthew 20:29-34

What will ye that I shall do unto you? What do you want? In last week's passage, the mother of James and John said she wanted Jesus to make her sons the two most important men in His Kingdom. Today we see quite a different sort of request. For instead of asking Jesus to satisfy their ambition by granting them worldly wealth and power, these two blind beggars ask Jesus for something much more basic – they ask for a miracle of healing.

Now, it's not easy to preach on miracle passages. For even in this week in which we give the Lord thanks for all our many, many blessings, we all know folks who are living every day with the need for some sort of a miracle. We all know those who are struggling with chronic pain or disease, and those who are engaged in daily care of the sick. We know those who are worried about their loved ones, praying earnestly for healing of their bodies or souls. We know people who are struggling with addictions. We know people who are having trouble making ends meet.

And we know people for whom the holiday season is especially difficult – those who are wrestling with loneliness and grief. And family is not always a blessing: we all know folks whose difficult relationships can transform what should be the most joyous days of the year into yet another burden that must be endured. And so we know that, however blessed we are, we all still need God to be active in our lives in one way or another. We need Him to answer our prayers, and maybe even to do a miracle for us.

And so when we read passages like this, it would be easy to become bitter. It would be easy for us to complain, "These blind men got their miracle – so where's mine?" Oh yes, in the face of our continuing problems it would be easy for us to be angry or resentful at God. And there are many people who have in fact walked away from the Church for this very reason, unwilling to worship a God Who has so deeply disappointed them.

So, what do those of us who are in need of a miracle do with this miracle story? Well, if we realize, as most of us do, that we are in fact helpless and needy in so many ways, then maybe we should sit down with these blind beggars who are so much like us. Maybe we need to look in the direction in which their sightless eyes are focused. Maybe we need to hear what they hear.

For the first thing they heard wasn't the voice of Jesus, but the noise and the bustle of the approaching multitude. Now, from the time that Jesus performed His first miracles of healing He had been surrounded by crowds, many of whom were seeking the same sort of miracles that these blind men needed – the same sort of miracles that we need.

But this crowd was larger and more boisterous than usual, because Jesus was making His final journey to Jerusalem. In fact, in the very next passage, Matthew records how He made His triumphal entry into the capital city, and so it is likely that many of the people going with Him through Jericho would follow Him all the way to Jerusalem.

In other words, the throng that surrounded Jesus was happy and excited. They were anticipating the imminent re-establishment of the Davidic monarchy, and the equally swift expulsion of the hated Romans from their territory. They were announcing the coming and clearing the way of the King for whom they had waited for so, so long.

And so, in their eagerness and impatience, we might expect this multitude to have the sort of attitude we find displayed in verse 31 – for they had no time for the cries of pitiful beggars. With their heads filled with grand geopolitical matters, they were confident that Jesus' royal itinerary could not possibly tolerate any unscheduled stops. They considered themselves to be the winners in life's lottery, so it's no wonder they insisted that such pitiful losers as these blind men be quiet and allow the procession to proceed.

So, how did they respond to the multitude's callous rejection? They surely would have liked to go along with the exultant crowd, worming their way through the throng to touch Jesus as so many others were doing in hopes of being healed. But they couldn't. There was just no way they could even identify Jesus in the midst of such

a multitude. No, the noise of the joyous, jostling crowd only served to bring their own helplessness, their own need into clearer focus. So it would have been easy for the blind beggars to envy those in the throng.

Okay, so what about us? As we are impatient for Jesus to give us justice, and as we look at our own need for miracles, do we ever fall into that sort of envy? After all, Nissan built a plant outside of Canton and Continental built a factory outside of Clinton, so what about us? Madison County and Rankin County are growing fast, but many of those who do have work in Claiborne County don't seem to want to live here.

And isn't it easy for us to envy so many of the individuals we see around us? Why can't our spouses be as loving, our children as obedient, our jobs as rewarding? Why can't we be as wealthy and healthy, as happy and fulfilled as other people seem to be? Oh, yes, it's easy to see how these blind men could envy the impatient crowd that was trying to pass them by.

On the other hand, it would be just as easy to fall into despair, believing that we could never have what others have, that we could never do what others do. Just so, it would have been easy for these two blind men to hear the cutting, cruel remarks of the crowd around Jesus and lose all hope.

But the two blind beggars rejected both envy and despair. For their sightless eyes actually saw much more than the crowd could see. For they refused to dwell on their hopeless condition. They refused to be identified by their helplessness or their need. They weren't even deterred by the multitude that was trying to shut them up. No, they were both completely focused on Jesus.

Now, to be sure, they really didn't know any more about Jesus than the rest of the crowd did. After all, when they cried out to Jesus as the Son of David, they were confessing the same thing that so many of the people in the crowd doubtless believed: that Jesus is the Messiah, the root from the stump of Jesse, the Lion of Judah. By calling Jesus the "Son of David," they were thus proclaiming that Jesus has the authority to reign, not just over David's kingdom, but to the very ends of the Earth.

And, again like so many in the crowd, they also knew that Jesus, the miracle-working rabbi from Nazareth, had already demonstrated His power to heal the sick, to cast out demons, to cleanse the lepers, to make the lame walk and, yes, even to make the blind to see. They had probably even heard it said that Jesus had brought the dead back to life. No wonder His fame was so great that he was mobbed wherever He went. Yes, by asking Jesus to restore their sight, these two blind beggars, like everyone else in the crowd, were confessing His power to heal as well as to rule.

But just admitting that Jesus has the power to heal us and the authority to give us justice doesn't do us much good – that is if the Great Man did what the crowd wanted Him to do, if He passes us by while we continue to suffer. In fact, just concentrating on Jesus' ability to solve our problems might only lead us deeper into despair. After all, if He can help me, why doesn't He?

That's why the most important thing that these blind men saw wasn't Jesus' authority or Jesus' power. The crowd could see all that. No, these two saw something else, something that no one else could see: that Jesus is merciful, merciful enough to stop what He's doing in order to listen to a couple of helpless, blind beggars.

Remember, the multitude couldn't see that – they thought Jesus was too important, too busy to bother with such insignificant people and their petty problems. And you know, whenever we focus on the magnitude of our problems, whenever we give ourselves over to worry or anxiety, to despair or envy, we are seeing Jesus only the way that impatient crowd did – only as a great man who is more than a little preoccupied with world affairs, capricious perhaps, but not a merciful, compassionate, loving Lord.

No, the irony is that it is only the blind men who could truly see Jesus. And true to their vision of Him, Jesus proves Himself to be as willing to help as He is able. Jesus proves Himself to be as merciful as He is powerful. For with only a touch, Jesus gave both of them their sight. So, it's no wonder that they followed Jesus. It's no wonder that they gave glory to God for the way He had blessed them.

And I'd like to think we would do the same thing. After all, during this Thanksgiving week, we give God thanks and praise for all of His past blessings, and even for the miracles He has already performed in our lives and in

the lives of our loved ones. Yes, we have known the power and the glory and the joy of verse 34, and, Lord willing, we will see them again.

But for many of us, for today, we remain in verses 30 and 31 – crying out to God, confessing His authority and power and mercy, and continuing to wait for His blessing. We wait with longing just as Abraham waited 25 years for Isaac to be born. We wait in suffering as God’s people waited 400 years in bondage in Egypt. We wait in silence as they waited 400 more years after the prophecy of Malachi for the Christ he said would come.

But we wait knowing much more than the Jericho crowd did, and even more than the once-blind beggars did. For we wait knowing that Jesus didn’t just come to earth to restore our physical bodies. We wait knowing that Jesus didn’t come to bring justice the way the crowd expected Him to – routing the Romans with the rod of His divine power.

For we know that Jesus’ journey didn’t end on a throne in Jerusalem but at a place outside the city called Golgotha. We know that Jesus came to suffer with us and to die for us to prove His compassion and His mercy. And we know that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father to prove His power and authority over everyone and everything in Heaven and on Earth.

So yes, like these blind beggars we cry out for a miracle, for all sorts of miracles. But as we wait for God to bless us, we can choose to keep our focus on our helplessness and on our need. We can choose to fall into despair or envy. We can allow our disappointment to drive a wedge between us and the God Who made us.

But instead, let us remember that we cry out to the same Jesus to whom these two blind beggars cried – not to a capricious tyrant, but to a suffering Savior, not to a self-important potentate, but to a merciful Master, a loving Lord. So, let us cry out knowing that the same Jesus that they trusted to stop and help them will stop and help us too. Let’s go to Him in prayer.