

What Do You See?

Mark 10:46-52

Last week, we saw in the previous passage that James and John had come to Jesus, asking Him to make them the two most important men in His Kingdom. Today, in the next story recorded in Mark's gospel, we see quite a different sort of request. For instead of asking Jesus for a share of His political power, Bartimaeus asks Jesus to do something impossible. He asks Him for a miracle.

Now, it's not easy to preach on miracle passages. After all, many of us in this room 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, who desperately pray for healing of their bodies or souls. We know people who are struggling with addictions. We know people with serious family dysfunctions – problems between husbands, wives, and children.

We know people who are wrestling with loneliness and grief. We can't hide these things from one another. In the intimacy of a small church in a small town we can't pretend that everything's fine, as hard as we might try to do so. We know that we need God to be active in our lives, to answer our prayers, to do miracles for us.

And so when we read passages like this, it would be easy to become bitter: "This blind man got his miracle – where's mine?" In the face of our continuing problems it would be easy to be angry or resentful at God. And there are many people who walk away from the Church for this very reason, unable to worship a God Who has so terribly disappointed them.

So, what do those of us who are in need of miracles do with this miracle story? Well, if we realize, as most of us do, that we are helpless and needy, then we need to sit down with this man who is so much like us – we need to sit with Bartimaeus. We need to look in the direction in which his sightless eyes are focused. We need to hear what he hears.

For the first thing he heard wasn't the voice of Jesus, but the bustle and tumult of the approaching crowd. Now, ever since Jesus did His first healing miracles He was surrounded by crowds, many of whom were probably seeking the same sort of miracles that Bartimaeus needed – the same sort of miracles that we need. But this crowd was larger and more raucous than usual, because Jesus was making his final journey to Jerusalem. In the very next chapter He will make His triumphal entry into the capital city, and so it is likely that many of the people going with Him through Jericho would accompany Him all the way to Jerusalem.

In other words, the crowd thronging around Jesus was happy and excited. They were anticipating the immanent 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.

No, the crowd had no time to listen to the cries of a pitiful beggar. The royal itinerary would not tolerate any unscheduled stops. Bartimaeus must be quiet and allow the procession to proceed.

But if the preoccupied crowd saw only a beggar looking for a handout, what did Bartimaeus see? He would like to go along with the crowd, but he couldn't. He would like to walk up to Jesus, and perhaps touch Him in hopes of being healed, but there would be no way for a blind man to find Jesus in such a large crowd. The joyous, boisterous crowd only served to bring his own helplessness, his own need into stronger focus. It would be easy for Bartimaeus to envy the rest of the people in the crowd.

What about us? As we look at our own need for miracles, do we ever fall into the trap of envy? *Canton got a Nissan plant, 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 want to live here.*

Yes, it would be so easy for us to look at the satisfied people around us and become envious. Why can't our spouses be as loving, our children as obedient, our jobs as rewarding? Why can't we be as happy and fulfilled as they are?

Or we could look at the crowd passing us by and fall into despair, believing that we could never have what they have, that we could never do what they do. It would have been easy for Bartimaeus to hear the cutting, cruel remarks of the crowd around Jesus and focus on his helpless need and lose all hope.

But Bartimaeus did none of those things, for his sightless eyes could see much more than the crowd could see. For he wasn't dwelling on his hopeless condition. He wasn't focused on his helplessness or his need. And he wasn't looking at the crowd with envy or bitterness. No, he was completely focused on Jesus.

Yes, Bartimaeus knew all that the crowd knew. For when he cried out, he addressed Jesus as the Son of David. Like the crowd, he was thus confessing that Jesus is the Messiah, the root from the stump of Jesse, the Lion of Judah. When Bartimaeus addressed Jesus as "Son of David," he was thus proclaiming that Jesus has the authority to reign, not just over David's kingdom, but to the very ends of the Earth.

But he was also confessing that Jesus' power extends even to the point of healing the sick. He knew that this was Jesus, the miracle-working rabbi from Nazareth, the One who cast out demons, the One who cleansed the lepers and made the lame to walk and, yes, who made the blind to see. It was even 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 crying out to Jesus, Bartimaeus, like everyone else in the crowd, was confessing Jesus' power to heal as well as to rule.

But just admitting that Jesus has the authority to heal us and the power to help us doesn't do us much good. For, just like Bartimaeus, it doesn't give us any comfort to watch the Great Man pass 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 this blind man sees isn't Jesus' authority and Jesus' power. The crowd could see all that. No, Bartimaeus also sees that Jesus is merciful – merciful enough to stop what He's doing in order to listen to a helpless, blind beggar.

Those who went before Jesus couldn't see that – they thought Jesus was too busy. And whenever we focus on the magnitude of our problems, giving ourselves over to worry or anxiety, to despair or envy, we are seeing Jesus only the way the crowd does – only as a great man who is more than a little capricious, a tyrant perhaps, but not a merciful, compassionate, loving Lord.

No, the irony is that it is only the blind man who truly sees Jesus. And true to Bartimaeus' 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. With a touch, Jesus restores the blind man's sight – no wonder he followed Jesus, glorifying God.

I'd like to think we would do the same thing. And I'm certain that we have given God the glory for the past miracles that He has performed in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones. We have known the power and the glory and the joy of verse 52, and, Lord willing, we will see them again.

But for many of us, for today, we remain in verse 48 – crying out to God, confessing His authority and power and mercy, and waiting for His blessing. We wait as Abraham waited 25 years for Isaac to be born. We wait as Joseph waited as a slave and as a prisoner before Pharaoh exalted him. We wait as God's people waited 400 years in bondage in Egypt, and as they waited 400 years for the coming of Christ after the prophecy of Malachi.

But we wait knowing more than the Jericho crowd did, and even more than the once-blind beggar did. We wait knowing that Jesus didn't just come to heal our bodies. We know that Jesus didn't just come to bring justice to the Earth by the rod of His 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.

Yes, we can focus on our helplessness and on our need. We can fall into despair or envy. We can allow our disappointment to drive a wedge between us and the God Who made us.

Yes, like the blind beggar we cry out for a miracle, for all sorts of miracles. But we must remember that we cry out to the same Jesus to whom he cried – not to a capricious tyrant, but to a suffering Savior, to a merciful Master, to a loving Lord. We must cry out knowing that the same Jesus that he trusted to stop and help him will stop and help us too. Let's go to Him in prayer.