

4/4/20 - Blind

As we approach Palm Sunday tomorrow, which begins Holy Week, we are looking at the two stories that lead up to it. Yesterday we met James and John who wanted greatness. Today, we meet Bartimaeus who wants to see.

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. - Mark 10:46-52

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus has asked this twice in the last two days, first to James and John, now to Bartimaeus. James and John wanted greatness. Bartimaeus just wants to see. These stories of greatness and blindness are two halves of a whole, and lead us in to Palm Sunday and Holy Week to follow. For all of them deal with spiritual blindness.

Heading to Jerusalem for Palm Sunday, Jesus passes through Jericho, the oldest continuously-inhabited city in the world. It was a wealthy city. The rich passed through on their way to Jerusalem to trade. The pious passed through on their way to Jerusalem to worship. And where the wealthy pious pass, beggars gathered. So here sits Bartimaeus the Blind, sitting on half his cloak for protection from the ground but with the other half folded on his lap to collect the alms he had received for that day. He hears that Jesus is coming, and cries out with the other beggars yet with a different cry. From the cacophony of shouts - "Alms!" "Please give!" - comes a single cry that catches Jesus' attention: "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

While this is a story about a miracle, it is more than that; it is a story about a call to faith. Jesus hears Bartimaeus' cry and "calls" him. The crowd "calls" to Bartimaeus, telling him that Jesus is "calling" him. Three times in 2 sentences, we hear the Call of Bartimaeus. Yet while the Apostle Paul was struck blind as part of his call, Bartimaeus... well, let's read on. Bartimaeus throws his cloak aside, scattering his day's alms collection, and possibly all he had in the world, and jumps to his feet. And finally we're back where we began: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus the Blind is revealed to be better sighted than either the famous disciples of the last story or the crowds of Jerusalem in the next. For Bartimaeus asks for truth, he asks for understanding, he asks for spiritual growth - Bartimaeus asks to see. But this is not just making his eyes right. It is a cry to make his heart right. "Rabbi, I want to see," and he does. Unlike James and John yesterday, unlike the crowds who cheer Jesus on and then

turn and cry for His death in the blink of a week, Bartimaeus isn't seeking his own glory, or his own vengeance. He is seeking Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" If Jesus was asking this of you today, what would you say? Would you throw aside all you have to gain Jesus' healing? Would you, like Bartimaeus, ignore the crowd around you in order to get to see Jesus? What do you want from Jesus today?