

“Servants Have 20/20 Vision”

Mark 10:46-52

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For years I have observed it. When a high government official such as the President visits a city, the mayor does his or her best to make the parade route look neat and clean. For sure, all the homeless people are removed and secluded during the President’s visit. Evidently it would not be appropriate for the President to see, much less encounter one of them.

Somebody in Jericho slipped up. A blind beggar positioned himself along the parade route that Jesus traveled on his way to Jerusalem and caused a scene. Let’s follow the story as Mark tells it.

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd were leaving the city, a blind man named Bartimaeus 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!’ Mark 10:46-48.

Why do you think the crowd tried to silence this beggar? Were they trying to protect Jesus? Did they believe he was too important to have to deal with this common citizen or too busy to be distracted by the needs of one chronically ill man? Maybe.

Or were they trying to protect themselves? Jesus was conducting a mobile classroom and they wanted to hear answers to the questions he was asked. The pleas of this beggar were drowning out the words of Jesus and causing them great frustration. So what were they to do other than tell him to be quiet?

We don’t need to be too hard on these people, though. We may be just as guilty as they were. I wonder whose cries for help we ignore or try to silence?

Last spring I attended the Celebration of Pentecost service hosted by the Regional Council of Churches of Atlanta. It was held at the beautiful Peachtree Christian Church downtown. The guest preacher was Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., senior minister of The Riverside Church in New York City. Newsweek magazine named him one of the most effective preachers in the English speaking world. After hearing him, I agree.

One of the things he said that day that spoke to my heart was this. “We must get out of our cul-de-sacs of religiosity and join others on the road of life. We must listen for the cries of those that are hurting and go help them.”

Then he asked us, “Do you hear the cries of that mother who put her child to bed hungry? What about the father that has no health insurance that is having chest pains? What about the child that is an orphan because his parents died of AIDS? What about the family that is heating their home with a dangerous kerosene heater because their electricity was cut off? What about the couple paying exorbitant interest rates on a loan to repair their car? Do you hear these people crying from where you are?” I am ashamed to say that most of us don’t.

Jesus heard the cry of a lonely beggar that day, though, and to the surprise of almost everyone stopped and said, **“Call him.”** Why do you think Jesus did this? Did he stop every time he heard someone call his name? Doubtful. So why now? I’m sure he

wanted to help the man, but there had to be another reason. I think Jesus wanted to teach the crowd following him something very important about living and serving in the Kingdom of God. What was that? Nothing was more important than helping people, nothing, not even teaching.

In this story, when confronted with a choice between teaching and helping someone with a specific need, Jesus chose the latter. Does this mean teaching is unimportant? Certainly not, for teaching is about people, too. However, words are no substitute for action when someone is hurting.

Do you recall what James wrote about this? “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead” James 2:14-16.

I have discovered that ministry, for the most part, means helping people one person at a time at their convenience. The words in Leonard Griffith’s book, We Have This Ministry, have stayed with me. “A servant is one who meets another’s need at their convenience and expects no gratitude.” This is good advice for people called to be servants and Jesus modeled it well.

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 10:49-52.

Do you know where that road led? It led to Jerusalem during the most festive time of the year, Passover. Over two hundred thousand people gathered each year in the capital city for the celebration. This could have been this beggar’s first Passover or at least the first one in a long time. Can you imagine his excitement and enthusiasm, especially at this Passover. He witnessed all the pageantry of Palm Sunday and the coronation of Jesus, the man that healed him. What a blessing his restored eyesight was. That is, until Friday of Passover week when he gazed upon a hill and saw three crosses and the man hanging on the middle cross was the Great Physician. I wonder then if he was sorry that he could see again.

Sight is a blessing and a curse, isn’t it? Of all my five senses, sight is the last one I want to lose. However, there are times that I see things that confuse, disturb, upset, hurt, anger or grieve me.

This is why I need more than physical sight. I also need to be able to see through eyes of faith. Spiritual sight helps me to appreciate the beauty that is all around but it also helps me to see the less desirable parts of life so that I can confront and change them.

Near the beginning of this sermon, I asked you whose cries for help you were ignoring or silencing. It is easier to turn a deaf ear when we don’t see the person suffering, isn’t it? The sight of their plight haunts us, doesn’t it? This is why charities show us the pictures of starving children living in deplorable conditions.

Maybe you need to make the same request of Jesus that Bartimaeus did, “Rabbi, I want to see.” I have a feeling servants have 20/20 vision.

