

**- Saint John's Pulpit (Oct. 24, Stewardship Campaign Sunday)
- "I Want to See!" Mark 10:46-52**

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." ⁵² Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Mark 10, the last page before Jesus' entering Jerusalem

To begin with, I am very grateful to Rev. Jim Leamon and Barbara Turpyn for their wonderful messages for the last two Sundays. Although we did not intend, Pastor Leamon shared his message from the New Testament, and Barbara preached her sermon from the Old Testament, the Book of Isaiah. It was a great privilege to enjoy messages by these preachers and their different perspectives for a common theme on stewardship. I believe St. John's is blessed and nourished because of these preachers.

This morning we read one story from Mark 10. In many ways, Mark 10 is a very interesting chapter. As the earliest written gospel, Mark has its own position in terms of delivering Jesus' primitive messages. Mark 10 plays an important role in dividing between 'Jesus before passion' and 'Jesus on the way to passion'. From Mark 11, we see Jesus enter Jerusalem for his suffering and passion. If so, Mark 10 is the last chapter delivering Jesus' messages at the moment of wrapping up his ministry.

A careful examination of Mark 10 makes us see there are some messages and characters: Messages about Divorce and Children, the Rich Young Man, the last foretelling about Jesus' Death and Resurrection, a special request by James and John, and the Blind Bartimaeus. Very interestingly, the first character and the last character were not Jesus' direct disciples – the rich young man and the blind Bartimaeus. Furthermore, the last scene of Mark 10 is a story of the blind Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus, the last character seen in Mark 10 before Jesus' entering Jerusalem... who is he? What lessons do we get from his story as we enter a moment of the Stewardship campaign?

The Rich Young Man Vs. The Poor Blind Bartimaeus

In general, the Rich Young Man and the Poor Blind Bartimaeus have lots of things in common. Here are some examples. The rich young man called Jesus a good teacher (very pedantic or noble expression, but no clue for him to believe Jesus as Messiah). He sought eternal life. In spite of Jesus' invitation, he didn't follow Jesus because he failed to give up his possessions.

On the other hand, the poor blind Bartimaeus called (or shouted out) Jesus Jesus, Son of David (a very popular expression among people to understand Jesus, the Messiah). He wanted to recover his vision, period! As soon as he heard from Jesus, Bartimaeus threw off his cloak. Upon recovering his vision, he followed Jesus immediately.

The rich young man...this person whom we highly expected to see his becoming disciple failed to follow Jesus Christ. By contrast, Bartimaeus... this person whom we have no expectation to see his becoming disciple followed Jesus Christ and entered Jerusalem with Jesus. So, Mark 10 challenges us to think of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ seriously and makes us see how so hard we become His disciples.

So, throwing off his cloak...

One thing requiring our careful attention was the moment Bartimaeus did when he was called by Jesus.

⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Mark 10:49-50 NRSV

Personally, I (maybe you) cannot understand why he had to throw off his cloak in this story although this made his story more meaningful. To this poor blind Bartimaeus, his cloak had multiple purposes. It might be his coat, his tent protecting from hot sunlight or cold dew, his kiosk mat to do begging when he needed some help from others, or his everyday blanket. No matter how Bartimaeus needed his cloak seriously.

For the rich young man, although he was asked to sell his possessions and share them with others, his possessions were not life-essential goods, because he had parents who nurtured him very well, and most of all, he had a normal vision. However, Bartimaeus was not in the same shoe as the rich young man. Technically, his vision was not good. Furthermore, he was not asked to give up his cloak by Jesus! But this blind man threw off his cloak when he was called.

Of course, I do not want to evaluate who is the winner or loser in Mark 10. But we all agree that the last character in Mark 10 deserves a winner's place. Who is he? He is Bartimaeus.

When we believe in Jesus, we tend to expect Jesus to bless my possessions, my family, my health, my job, and my children. It sounds like that we do not consider giving up something for Jesus. So, some theologians called it prosperity theology. Although we actually are not at the level of prosperity theology, it is true that we want to buy Jesus and get all blessings through him – BOGO! The rich young man typically wanted not only to get eternal life through Jesus but also to keep all his possessions for his own. Although he saw Jesus in front of him with his clear vision, he couldn't see him as his Messiah to follow.

Here is a reason why Bartimaeus should be noted by all of us very seriously. Bartimaeus knew that his cloak should be an obstacle when he comes to Jesus although his cloak was what he had. Because he knew that Jesus is his only Messiah to heal him and to follow in his entire life, Bartimaeus could throw off his cloak without hesitation and come to Jesus because Jesus was the way, the life, and the truth to him. You remember a dialogue between Jesus and Thomas in John 14. When Thomas asked Jesus where he is going, what was Jesus' response?

⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 NRSV

Isn't it amazing for this blind man to know where to go clearly? And here is one more thing to know. The moment Bartimaeus threw off his cloak was before Jesus healed his vision. This means that Bartimaeus decided to surrender his only possession (cloak) before his vision recovery. What a dangerous gamble in the eyes of secular people! But in our eyes, it was faith!

What Do We See Now?

We are now doing St. John's Stewardship campaign for 2022. To be honest, as a pastor, I have a deep concern about what's going on in 2022. Should I be more honest? There are lots of hurdles in front of us. Pandemic recovery, bad economy nation and worldwide, losing church membership by death or relocation, hard to get new members, General Conference in August 2022, and so on. I know that you feel pain whenever you go grocery shopping or gas stations. All things are not easy to promise a big success in our stewardship campaign.

However, I am very grateful to you all for your prayers and supports. During the pandemic, most churches do not meet in-person services, we St. John's have done in-person services wonderfully. We gladly have supported and served our neighbors victimized by hurricane Ida, all other natural disasters, and Afghan refugees. Unlike the rich young man, we did it!

In that sense, I believe that St. John's family is like Bartimaeus. We love Jesus, are eager to come to Jesus, our messiah. In addition to this, we know we need to throw off our cloaks to see Jesus. We know that we need our cloak to sustain our daily life, but we also know that cloak should not be a stumbling block to following Jesus Christ. So, how can we do this?

The story today challenges us to see Jesus Christ. It is not a matter of your physical vision, but a matter of your spiritual vision. The more we see Jesus truly, the better we see the moment to do something for Jesus and our church. Thank you so much for your prayers and supports. May God bless you all and our loving church, St. John's United Methodist Church.