

Blessed are any of you, most blessed indeed, who would cry aloud: ***“Rabbi Jesus, I want to see!”***

As, during last week, I reflected on these stories from Mark’s Gospel, the word of God got close to the bone. It has a way of doing that. I found myself wondering whether I’d travelled so long in the company of Christ and his disciples that I now took too much for granted and was losing my vision.

Have I become slightly bored with it all and do I now look for religious favours? Am I looking these days for topping on the cake rather than enjoying the basic bread of life? Or is there, please God, something of the beggar still alive in me? Is there somewhere within my being that urgent, hungry creature? So that when Jesus says: ***“What do you want me to do for you?”*** I cry out: ***“Lord that I might see!”***

Bartimaeus knew his first need. He was desperate. How desperate are you and I? Are we the sighted who remain blind, or the blind who are longing to see?

My friends, the key is in the wanting. What do we really want? That is the question Jesus puts to those who approach him with hope. May we answer it boldly today and all the days ahead!

If you would like to take this opportunity to answer ‘yes’ to Jesus, I offer you an invitation to respond? In the safety of this sacred place and as we sing, come and light a candle as a sign of your deep desire to cry out: ***“Lord that I might see!”***

To the praise of the Name that is timeless and the Love that is boundless.

**Amen!!**

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*A Message from Mark!*

## **What Do You Want?**

**25th October 2009 Pentecost 21**

**Scripture: Mark 10:46-52**

**Prayer:** *Loving God, your light dazzles and confuses the arrogant, yet gives hope to the beggar and sight to those who live in shadows. Please count us among the sight-impaired beggars, holy Friend, that by the word of Jesus we may see more clearly, share more generously the good things you have done for us, and by faith anticipate the even better things you have in store for us. Through this same Jesus of Nazareth. Amen!*

*Jesus said to him [blind Bartimaeus] “What do you want me to do for you” Mark 10:51*

Come with me on an imaginary walk. It’s Spring in Jericho, one of the oldest city sites in the world. Under a blue sky the palm trees are rustling in a slight breeze, the clear waters of the abundant springs are rippling through the town aqueducts and gutters. The shopkeepers are busily displaying their wares, people greet each other with **“Salaam, Shalom”** and gather in clusters to gossip or bargain or pass the time of day; and a young Rabbi and his disciples set out on a fateful journey to Jerusalem.

As they leave the city, a blind beggar who is sitting in his favourite spot under a shady tree, cries out for some mercy. Some of the locals tell him to stop whimpering and to shut up; but he cries out louder for the young Rabbi to come and help him. The Rabbi is not so impatient as the onlookers. He stops and asks the beggar, who is called Bartimaeus, to come to him.

Did you note that? This insightful Rabbi wants the beggar to make some effort, to show willing. The fellow stands up, throws off his beggar’s cloak, and approaches the teacher. Rabbi Jesus then puts to him a simple yet profound question: ***“What do you want me to do for you?”***

Haven't we heard that phrase before somewhere? ***“What do you want me to do for you?”*** Those of you who were with us at 8.30 last Sunday heard it then. In the Gospel reading last week, Jesus put the same question to James and John when they approached him asking for a favour. ***“What do you want me to do for you?”*** Jesus asked. What did James and John have in common with the blind beggar to evoke the same words from Jesus?

At this stage, during the last month of Jesus' life, James and John had been in the company of the Rabbi for a few years. They were among a select inner group of especially trusted disciples. They had heard Jesus teaching, wondered at his parables, were amazed to see him place his hands on diseased lepers, saw him sit down to eat with the local Mafia and street girls, and watched him bring peace to tormented minds and to guilty souls.

James and John heard Jesus repeatedly talk about his coming death, and now they stuck close to him as he set his face like a flint and walked unflinchingly towards Jerusalem, where his enemies rubbed their hands and waited. James and John were in fact among the most privileged people ever to have lived; they were friends and confidants of the utterly remarkable Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet what more did they want from him? Jesus asked: ***“What do you want me to do for you?”*** The answer they gave revealed how appallingly blind they still were. Although they'd witnessed things the earth had never seen before, they had not really seen or understood much at all. Still blinded by their own selfish wants, they just required some favouritism. They lobbied Jesus for special position and authority in Christ's government: ***“When you come into your kingdom, let us sit by your side, one on your right, one on your left.”*** They wanted the chief cabinet posts much like present day politicians jostle for power and position in their parties!

What thick-heads! They had good eyes yet were much more blind than many of those, like Bartimaeus, who had no eyesight! They couldn't see beyond their own noses. As you would expect, Jesus poured cold water on that stupid request.

After that story of James and John, Mark takes us directly to blind Bartimaeus. I reckon the evangelist does it quite deliberately. The Gospel writers were not just recorders; not just scribes. The way they arrange their material is a part of their preaching.

Mark uses these contrasting incidents like parables. Put together, they carry a vigorous punch. The beggar cried out for help. People told him to shut up. Jesus overrode them and asked the blind man to come close. The man came. Then the key question: ***“What do you want me to do for you?”***

Without hesitation Bartimaeus cried: ***“Rabbi, I want to see!”*** This beggar didn't want to remain in his familiar groove, receiving charity from passers by. Nor did he look for favouritism such as James and John wanted. All he wanted was restored sight and he got it! By faith he received it there and then! He was now able not just to hear Jesus but to look on him with his own eyes. Immediately, Mark tells us Bartimaeus became a follower of Jesus and thus he began the journey of discipleship.

Where do we stand? With James and John or with the beggar of Jericho? If Jesus were to ask us: ***“I'll give you one wish. What do you want me to do for you?”*** what would be our honest answer? I say ***“honest”*** answer. Not some pretty answer, dressed up to look religiously nice, but the raw, uncensored stuff of our souls. What do we really desire? What do we profoundly hanker for?

I have more than a suspicion that if we were to project up on a screen the things each of us here might most want, our list could have more to do with James and John than with Bartimaeus. We too readily look for favours from Christ, almost like a spoilt child's Christmas wish list.

Maybe some of you are much saner. Perhaps you would indeed ask for better sight:

- That you might more clearly see the path Christ takes through the maze of this complex and often confusing life.
- That you might have better insight into how to express your faith in word and actions?
- Know when to stubbornly dig your heels in and when to compromise; when to speak and when to be silent for Christ's sake?
- Know how to be better stewards of your gifts, your education, life experience and possessions?
- Know how to best serve Christ in the cause of refugees.
- That you might see through all the hype, and be able to make the right decisions, on matters like euthanasia, genetic engineering, stem cell research, cloning and the transplanting of animal organs into humans?