

“Get Up and See”  
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III  
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana  
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**Mark 10: 46-52**

Have you ever wondered what it's like to be blind? Or deaf? Or lame? Perhaps some of you have had that experience or know someone who is. For those of us who are able to see or hear or walk, it is something very difficult to relate to. Unfortunately, the term “handicapped” is commonly used to refer to people like that, a term which was created by a culture where being deaf or blind was viewed as bad or weak.

Now, consider you are blind, deaf, or lame, and you suddenly have the chance to not be. How do you think you would react? Would you be excited and look forward to seeing your loved ones, birds and trees, and a variety of colors? Would you jump at the chance to hear music, the intonations of conversations, and so on? Or would you be hesitant, not sure about what such a huge change might cause in your life? Unless we've been through such an experience, it's hard to relate to that possibility.

Consider the blind man, Bartimaeus. He is a beggar who sits at the gate of the city of Jericho every day asking for pennies. He doesn't sit inside the walls of the city, because all the residents know him and don't bother to help him. Instead, he relies on the travelers who enter and leave Jericho to drop in his cup whatever they can spare.

Then, here comes Jesus, who Bartimaeus has heard so much about. Rather than being quiet and demure, the blind beggar turns up the volume. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The crowd's effort to shut him up only makes him more determined. “Son of David, have mercy on me!” His efforts pay off, and after a few moments, Bartimaeus is standing before Jesus. The Son of David asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

“What do you want me to do for you?” I wonder what our response would be if each of us were asked that question by Jesus. A cure for our chronic illness, or the restoration to health of one of our family members? Security in our future and the safety of our children and grandchildren? An end to war in conflicted areas of the world, and the return of peace among different people? The growth of Christ's Church, especially here at John Knox, and the renewal of people's faith in God? If Jesus asked you that question, how would you respond?

Bartimaeus was used to only getting money from those who passed by him. Now, he was given a chance at something he had thought was impossible. Rather than asking for more pennies, the blind beggar asks for a miracle: “My teacher, let me see again.” He doesn't care how great the odds, or how crazy his request might sound. This is his time, his moment with the Son of God. He might as well go for broke.

The question I would ask is, “Do we really want Jesus to let us see?” It is one thing to ask for money or security, but it’s quite another to have something lifted which has been a part of your identity your whole life. Bartimaeus obviously saw his blindness as something which held him back, and when Jesus granted his request, a totally new world was opened to him.

But that’s what we have to consider when we respond to Jesus’ question: “What do you want me to do for you?” It’s more than hearing things we have never heard, or seeing things we have never seen. It also is living a new life which we could never have known before. When we ask for answers to the complex questions of our life, we may be met with answers that do not make sense, or fly in the face of logic and reason. When we pray and pray for our church to grow and gain members, we may not be ready for how God intends for that to happen. When we tell Jesus, “Let me see,” what Jesus shows us may not be what we like or had hoped to see.

We may see the prejudice which lies in our heart. We may see the exclusion which rests in our social structures. We may witness the faults and sins we have committed in the past, and are doomed to continue because we fail to see as Jesus wants us to see.

On the other hand, we may see the future hope and possibilities which await us. We may see how our lives can be better if we are willing to follow the one who healed us. We may witness the change which takes place in us and in others, because we had the faith to ask for a miracle, and Jesus responded with more than we could imagine.

What will we ask of our Lord, when he asks us what he can do for us? One preacher puts it this way:

*Yes, seeing can be dangerous. It can call into question everything we’ve ever believed. It can dismantle our faith, our theology, our worldview. Seeing can devastate us.*

*And yet...and yet...a big part of following Jesus is seeing things as they really are. Why else would he try to show his disciples not once, not twice, but three times what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem? Seeing must be important to the life of faith.*

*But...if seeing is important to the life of faith and also has the potential to devastate us, what are we to do? Do we keep our hearts open but our eyes closed? Do we keep our eyes open but our hearts closed? Is there some way as a person of faith to keep both our eyes and our hearts open? How do we survive seeing?*

*Here’s how Bartimaeus survived it: He started with Jesus. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” First Bartimaeus acknowledges Jesus; then he is healed. First Bartimaeus trusts in Jesus; then he sees. Before Bartimaeus looks at anything, Jesus becomes the context for everything he will see. After his healing, Bartimaeus won’t see anything without thinking of the one who healed him: Jesus. Before the first ray of light hits the first molecule of either retina, Jesus becomes the context in which Bartimaeus will see everything.*

*What does it mean to see everything in the context of Jesus? When we look at the world in the context of Jesus, it’s true – we will see suffering. We’ll see*

*betrayal. We'll see death. It's unavoidable. The world is broken in so many places. A mature faith looks at those places. And sees them.*

*But, as Jesus tried to show his disciples time and time again, when you look at the world – even at its ugliest, hardest, and most fragile – when you see the world in the context of Jesus, you also see resurrection. Now, you might have to look at the ugly, hard, fragile things a long time before it happens, but eventually, always in the context of Jesus, you will see resurrection.*

*How do we people of faith survive seeing? We follow the example of Bartimaeus: We begin with Jesus* (Kimberleigh Buchanan, "Surviving Seeing," <http://day1.org/4262-surviving-seeing>).

In the end, we are all disabled. We are all in need of healing and being restored to wholeness. The question is this: will we ask to be restored to wholeness, and if we do, are we willing to live with how a new life in Christ will be? You can either sit by the gate and not bother the teacher, or you can stand up and shout, and let your faith lead you. Make your decision. Do not look back. Get up and see.

Thanks be to God. Amen.