

“Your faith has made you well”. Has anyone had or know someone who has had a miraculous healing? Over the years I’ve heard several stories of people being healed of serious diseases – at times the medical professionals can only describe this as miraculous. It’s hard to understand though why some people experience healing and some do not (i.e. my brother-in-law Richard – we prayed harder than ever for him but he still died of heart failure at the age of 51. My son Dan, who was about 10 at the time, asked me how this could have happened when we prayed fervently every night for months). It really is impossible for us to understand. But the gospel writers were very intentional about what they wrote. So why did Mark write about this miracle? For Mark, Jesus’ miracles not only demonstrate the power of God but reveal the identity of Jesus himself; they confront us with the divine authority of Jesus and thereby demand our response.

Mark tells two stories about Jesus restoring sight to the blind. For the first part of Mark’s gospel, up to the middle of chapter 8, even though Jesus does perform miracles, he tries to keep his identity a secret. The second major part of Mark’s gospel, from 8:22-10:52, we see how Jesus’ Messiahship becomes recognized. The transition begins when the eyes of a blind man are opened in two stages in ch.8, and is complete when a second blind man, Bartimaeus of today’s reading, addresses Jesus as ‘Son of David’.

For the first healing in ch.8, come to Bethsaida, a long way from Jerusalem. There a group of people led an unnamed blind man to Jesus, begging him to touch the blind man to restore his sight. Jesus leads the blind man *away* from the crowds, puts his spit on the blind man’s eyes and lays his hands on him. The blind man tells Jesus, *‘I can see people, but they look like trees walking.’* Jesus lays his hands on the blind man’s eyes a second time, and the man’s sight is fully restored. Jesus tells the previously blind man to go straight home and not to go into his village... The messianic secret is safe *for now*.

The contrast between that healing and the second healing which we have in our gospel today is important to note. Now we are in Jericho, only fifteen miles from Jerusalem. This time, the blind man is named: Bartimaeus; he makes his own way to Jesus, the

people around him trying to hold him back. He cries out for his own healing, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus calls the blind man to him in front of the crowd, and this time instead of using **spit**, Jesus pronounces with full authority, '*Go; your faith has made you well.*' Bartimaeus regains full sight immediately, leaves his possessions and follows Jesus on the way. This time Jesus makes no attempt to bind the man in secrecy. The messianic secret was out.

One of the most important things we need to grasp in our Christian walk is the identity of Jesus: **who he is**. Right after Jesus heals the first blind man in Mark 8, we find Peter making a bold declaration about Jesus:

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" They answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do **you** say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

Peter recognized who Jesus was as he had spent a long time with him. Bartimaeus recognized who Jesus was as he called Jesus by the messianic title, Son of David. Somehow a blind man was able to see this critical truth, which the crowd were unable to see.

I used to think Jesus was just a 'middleman' – why go through him? – just go straight to God! Through the gentle counsel of other Christians and careful reading of the bible, I eventually put my faith in Jesus as **God**, one of the three persons of the Godhead, the Trinity that forms our Christian concept of One God; my eyes were opened to a deeper and more holistic image of the nature of God. God became incarnate, embodied in Jesus. And not only is God in Jesus concerned with our *spiritual* healing but also with our *physical* and *social* well-being. This holistic healing includes the gift of **insight**: the healing of our **inner sight** – to be conscious of how we treat our bodies, and how we treat other people: to be concerned for well-being of our neighbors in our city, in our country and in our world.

When Bartimaeus' sight was restored, he laid aside his cloak upon which were his beggar's takings and meagre possessions, and he began to follow Jesus on **the way**. And where was Jesus headed? The very next story in Mark is of Jesus humbly entering Jerusalem on a donkey, on **the way** to the cross: the path of suffering and of sacrifice.

What does this mean for us as we lay down our own priorities to follow Jesus? We're not walking to an actual cross, but as with Bartimaeus, **our way** is the way of **discipleship** – this is what 'Christianity' is. And if we have become conscious and been given insight into what is currently happening in our world, being a faithful disciple means we **must** take some form of sacrificial action to defend people today whose well-being is compromised: asylum seekers, people of color, LGBT persons, Jewish people killed as they worship in their synagogue in Pittsburgh!!!

Martin Luther King once said, "What disturbs me most about the violence of the few is the silence of the many." I feel so angry about how much hatred and violence there is in our country today. It's tempting to bury our heads in the sand. But we must keep aware – and we must keep calm – keep praying – and stand up against the white nationalism that seems to be increasing in this country! Embrace diversity. After all, God *created* diversity! Embrace what Jesus teaches us through the gospels – to act with non-violence, inclusion and loving care. Amen.