

At Home Worship
October 24, 2021
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater



Artwork by Katie Reed

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also, with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

We gather to worship a God who heals.

We gather to worship a God who saves.

May God heal us, especially of those spiritual handicaps that keep us from being true disciples.

May God remove our spiritual blindness, that we may see and follow in Christ's footsteps.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Almighty and merciful God, only You can open the eyes of the blind so that we might see Your kingdom before us. And only You, Lord, can empower us to carry Your Gospel into the world. Show us all we need to see, then send us, Lord. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Open Our Eyes" # 2086 x2

Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus, to reach out and touch him, and say that we love him. Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen. Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

Redeeming God, we confess not only that we are blind to your Kingdom, its values, and its goals, but also that we sometimes ignore and avoid Christ's way even when we see it clearly. Forgive us, we pray. Remove our spiritual blindness and shyness, so that we may see clearly and follow boldly the path you have set before us in Christ.

(silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

As Jesus healed the afflicted and restored those who have died, he also forgives our sins and gives us new life. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Open My Eyes, That I May See" # 451

1. Open my eyes, that I may see, Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me; Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see, Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!
2. Open my ears, that I may hear, Voices of truth Thou sendest clear; And while the wave notes fall on my ear, everything false will disappear. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see, Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!
3. Open my mouth, and let me bear, gladly the warm truth everywhere; Open my heart and let me prepare love with Thy children thus to share. Silently now I wait for Thee, Ready my God, Thy will to see, Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

Standing Tall

Mark 10:46-52

A few years back, Jim Stovall decided to become a stock broker. Even though he is blind, Jim has a determination and commitment to hard work that has helped him to transcend his disability. Jim also has a wife, Crystal, who supports and encourages him in everything he does. Jim and Crystal studied hard to get through the broker exams, then went through training sessions together. Most of the other students in the training sessions were better educated and better trained than Jim. They had no handicap to hold them back. And Jim knew that he would have to work extra hard to compete against these fellows.

In one of the training sessions, a teacher insisted that each broker needed to make one hundred telephone calls a day in order to drum up business. Jim and Crystal decided that, in order to succeed, they would make two hundred calls a day. For sixteen hours a day, Jim and Crystal worked like dogs to get people's business. They worked to the point of exhaustion to get their two hundred calls a day.

After six months, the brokerage put out a report ranking all the brokers in the training classes and how much they had made in that six-month period. Jim Stovall was ranked number one in his class. None of the other brokers made anywhere near the money he had. It was almost embarrassing. Jim called up his trainer and asked how it was possible that the others weren't seeing the success he was. The trainer laughed, amazed that Jim hadn't figured it out. He explained that he always exhorted the stockbrokers in his training sessions to make one hundred phone calls a day in the

hopes that they would at least make ten a day. Jim was the only one who had taken the trainer seriously. And he had made two hundred calls a day. So he was, in essence, working twenty times harder than the other guys.

I thought of Jim Stovall as I read the story of Bartimaeus. Some people are defeated when life throws them a bad break. They crumble when their dreams don't work out. They fold when they draw a few bad cards. They moan and they groan and they make everyone around them miserable just because they suffer a few minor disappointments. What if you had lost your sight like Jim Stovall or were born blind like Bartimaeus?

It's a grand story. Jesus and his disciples were on the road leading out from Jericho. A blind beggar was sitting by the way side. He was called Bartimaeus, which means, simply, the son of Timaeus.

Here's a man with no name, and given his circumstance, no prospects of success. An anonymous beggar on the side of the road.

People passed him by without even seeing him. Or they passed by on the other side of the road so they could ignore him. Or they grudgingly tipped him a few coins. And some despised him because he reminded them of how miserly they were with their charity.

Nobody likes beggars, do they? Especially if they are aggressive--if they forget to stay in their place? Bartimaeus was somewhat like that. He heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene passing by, so he began to cry out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." And what happened when he made his cry? Many in the crowd began to rebuke him, that he should hold his peace. Pushy beggar! Why can't he accept his fate like the rest of us? What right does a blind man have with hopes and dreams? But Bartimaeus cried out a great deal more, "Son of David, have mercy on me."

And something interesting happened. Jesus stopped and said, "Tell him to come here." And someone called to Bartimaeus, and said, "Cheer up. The Master is calling for you." And Bartimaeus threw off his garment, sprang up, and came to Jesus. This is faith in action! This is enthusiasm! He doesn't just slink up to Jesus, as would be appropriate for an outcast and unclean person. He jumps up and stands tall before the Messiah. He throws off anything that would stand between him and the Savior. As pastor David McKenna says, "Posture always gives clues to self-esteem." Bartimaeus had probably spent most of his life sitting by the side of the road, begging for charity from passers-by. But when he hears that Jesus wants to see him, he stands up in full dignity before the Lord.

I believe there is something important for us to see here. Do you remember how your Mother used to tell you not to slouch--not to hunch over when you walk? Let me repeat David McKenna's words, "Posture always gives clues to self-esteem."

It's true. People who feel good about themselves walk differently than people who do not. I want to say to every young person in the room: This time your Mom is right. "Posture always gives clues to self-esteem."

GOD'S WILL IS FOR EVERY PERSON ON EARTH TO STAND TALL. God's will is for everyone on this earth to feel good about themselves. God's will is for no one to grovel by the road seeking hand-outs. God's will is that no one should ever be denied dignity because of a physical,

emotional or social condition. Neither should anyone be discriminated against because of their income, their education or their status in society. In God's eyes, every person is a person of worth, a person of dignity.

Pastor Charles Swindoll tells about attending a Bible conference at which lay people were encouraged to think of their jobs as a holy calling, just like the ministry. God has called all of us to use our talents and abilities in a way that glorifies him, whether we work as a taxi driver, a data-entry clerk, or a custodian.

Near the end of the conference, Swindoll overheard one man ask another, "Say, Tom, what's your job?" And Tom, standing straight and dignified, replied, "I am an ordained plumber."

That's good theology and a healthy way to look at yourself and your work. No one should ever apologize for the way they earn a living--as long as it is an honest living. A plumber can be called by God just as surely as a preacher.

Some people undoubtedly looked down on Bartimaeus because he was blind and because he was a beggar. But what was Bartimaeus to do? There were no courses in braille in his time. There was no Goodwill Industries, no government training programs. He could beg or he could starve. Those were his only two choices. **AT LEAST THOSE WERE HIS ONLY TWO CHOICES UNTIL HE MET JESUS.** When he met Jesus, he met a man who could heal him and make him whole.

Let me tell you about a young man named Tucker Church. Tucker Church was born with cerebral palsy, resulting in bowed legs and inward-pointing feet. He walked with a noticeable stagger. In spite of his disability, Tucker played sports, even baseball. A local coach allowed fifteen-year-old Tucker to play in the nine-to-twelve-year-old league. But a coach from an opposing team protested the decision, so Tucker was kicked off his team. What a guy! You can imagine that this coach would have been one of those trying to keep Bartimaeus in his place.

In 1995, journalist Bob Greene wrote a sympathetic story for the Chicago Tribune about Tucker Church's struggle to live a normal, happy life. One reader contacted the Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children in Houston, Texas. The doctors there had perfected a new kind of surgery that specifically treated Tucker's leg problems. Three surgeries and much physical therapy later, Tucker Church walked out of Shriners Hospital six inches taller. He walks so straight and tall that few people even realize he has cerebral palsy.

Tucker Church came into contact with people who could help him. So did Bartimaeus--at least he came into contact with one person who could help him. Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What would you have me do for you?" And Bartimaeus said, "I want to see!" That's pretty straightforward. Notice that Bartimaeus didn't hem and haw around and say timidly, "Master, please Master, if it is your will, Master, I would kinda like to have my vision restored. Pretty please. If it's not too much trouble."

That's how many of us approach God. I can tell you, friend, you don't have to apologize for asking God's help for your problem--whatever that problem may be. It is not God's will that any of God's children should suffer. We share in the pain of an imperfect, fallen world, but God does not will that any of God's own should suffer. We don't know why there is such suffering in the world, but we know God is a God of love and grace. God's will is that we all should walk tall.

Jesus said to Bartimaeus, "Go on your way; your faith has made you whole." And Bartimaeus received his sight, and he followed Jesus.

The miracles of Jesus are a major stumbling block to our scientifically sophisticated society. We tend to think God's power is limited by his own natural laws. But be careful how much of a limitation you put on God. Medical science is producing miraculous cures all the time by finding new ways to manipulate the natural laws that govern our world. Shall we deny God the same opportunity?

Think about this statistic: there are over 100 billion stars in our galaxy. Scientists estimate that there may be 100 billion or so galaxies in the universe. It's safe to assume that each of those 100 billion galaxies has at least 100 billion stars in it. A God who could create all those galaxies and all those stars must have powers beyond anything we could ever imagine.

Bartimaeus was not a person who would passively accept his fate. Somehow Bartimaeus had a sense of personal dignity and worth even though he was only a blind beggar. And he called out to Jesus. And Jesus heard his cry, and Jesus healed him.

AND THAT'S THE FINAL THING WE NEED TO SEE: JESUS HEALS PEOPLE. Sometimes he does it through doctors, sometimes through counselors, sometimes through friends, sometimes through people we don't even know.

In 1949, a young soldier returned home from the war to find his mother desperately ill with kidney problems. She needed an immediate blood transfusion to save her life. Unfortunately, no one in the family shared the mother's very rare blood type of AB negative, and blood banks didn't exist in those days.

The young soldier decided to gather his family together to say goodbye to his mother. As he was driving home from the hospital, he stopped to pick up another young soldier who was hitchhiking. The hitchhiker noticed the young man's tears and asked him what was wrong. The young man blurted out the story of his dying mother. In silence, the hitchhiker took off his dog tags and held them out to the young man. On the tags were listed his blood type: AB negative. The mother received her transfusion that night and recovered fully. She lived another 47 years after that fateful night.

Coincidence? We don't know. This soldier and his family think the hitchhiker was an angel sent by God. All we know is that these coincidences happen quite often for people of faith. Jesus heals. He healed Bartimaeus and he has healed millions of others--emotionally, spiritually, and, sometimes, physically.

There is much we don't understand about healing. There is even more that we don't understand about God's role in healing, but we do know that God's will is for healing and wholeness. God's will is for no one to have to grovel in the dust. God's will is for every one of God's children to stand tall before him. Bartimaeus didn't hesitate. When Jesus was near, Bartimaeus called out to him and when Jesus sounded his name, Bartimaeus jumped to his feet and rushed to the Master. Exactly as we should when we have a need.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn “Pass It On”

1. It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing;
That's how it is with God's love, once you've experienced it, Your spread the love to everyone
you want to pass it on.
2. What a wondrous time is spring, when all the trees are budding, the birds begin to sing, the
flowers start their blooming; That's how it is with God's love, once you've experienced it.
you want to sing, it's fresh like spring, you want to pass it on.
3. I wish for you my friend this happiness that I've found; you can depend on Him, it matters not
where you're bound, I'll shout it from the mountain top, I want the world to know, The Lord of love
has come to me, I want to pass it on.

Blessing

Peace to you. 3 John 15