

“Give Up Blindness” Prepared by the Rev. Dr. Bob Stebe

11-1-26

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Psalm 34:1-8

Mark 10:46-52

Psalm 34

Psalm 34 is a psalm of praise and thanks for God coming to the rescue in a time of suffering.

The psalmist's experience is to be an example to look to the Lord in times of distress. Let us see God through the words of the psalmist as we hear God's word for us.

I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise will always be in my mouth.

² I praise the Lord—
let the suffering listen and rejoice.

³ Magnify the Lord with me!
Together let us lift his name up high!

⁴ I sought the Lord and he answered me.
He delivered me from all my fears.

⁵ Those who look to God will shine;
their faces are never ashamed.

⁶ This suffering person cried out:
the Lord listened and saved him from every trouble.

⁷ On every side, the Lord's messenger protects those who honor God;
and he delivers them.

⁸ Taste and see how good the Lord is!
The one who takes refuge in him is truly happy!

⁹ You who are the Lord's holy ones, honor him,
because those who honor him don't lack a thing.

¹⁰ Even strong young lions go without and get hungry,
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

¹¹ Come, children, listen to me.

Let me teach you how to honor the Lord:

¹² Do you love life;
do you relish the chance to enjoy good things?

¹³ Then you must keep your tongue from evil
and keep your lips from speaking lies!

- ¹⁴ Turn away from evil! Do good!
Seek peace and go after it!
- ¹⁵ The Lord's eyes watch the righteous,
his ears listen to their cries for help.
- ¹⁶ But the Lord's face is set against those who do evil,
to eliminate even the memory of them from the earth.
- ¹⁷ When the righteous cry out, the Lord listens;
he delivers them from all their troubles.
- ¹⁸ The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;
he saves those whose spirits are crushed.
- ¹⁹ The righteous have many problems,
but the Lord delivers them from every one.
- ²⁰ He protects all their bones;
not even one will be broken.
- ²¹ But just one problem will kill the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be held responsible.
- ²² The Lord saves his servants' lives;
all those who take refuge in him
won't be held responsible for anything.

Mark 10:46-52

This story of Bartimaeus concludes the middle section of Mark's gospel, which began with the healing of sight. That story in chapter 8 was the healing in two stages. The significance showed that clarity about Jesus' mission does not come right away. Then while he is on the way to Jerusalem with his disciples and other followers, Jesus:

- Predicts his death, three times
- Takes Peter, James and John up a high mountain where Jesus is transformed
- Heals a demon-possessed boy
- Teaches about divorce and remarriage
- Blesses the children
- Teaches that salvation is not about possessions, and that the first will be last and the last will be first
- Followed by James and John asking about having privileged positions in Jesus' kingdom, which shows that even those closest to Jesus have little clarity about Jesus' mission

Now this entourage enters Jericho where they encounter a blind beggar. The other bookend, where the healing of sight teaches what it takes to truly see.

⁴⁶ Jesus and his followers came into Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, together with his disciples and a sizable crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, Timaeus' son, was sitting beside the road. ⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!" ⁴⁸ Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, show me mercy!"

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him forward."

They called the blind man, "Be encouraged! Get up! He's calling you."

⁵⁰ Throwing his coat to the side, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The blind man said, "Teacher, I want to see."

⁵² Jesus said, "Go, your faith has healed you." At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus on the way.

GIVE UP BLINDNESS

Why do our arms get shorter with age?

- Can't see the message on your cell phone
- Look at a menu as if you don't have elbows

At some point it catches up with all of us – presbyopia.

- Not caught in a Presbyterian Church
- Caught by those in every faith...and those with none.
- Common eyesight problem
- Presby = elder opia=eye/sight
 - o Deterioration of close-up focus
 - o Clear lens of the eye loses elasticity
- Difference between ordering chicken breast or chuck roast.

First thing I tried were cheap reading glasses.

- Readers on...readers off. Annoying
- Need multiple pairs --- computer
 - o Not one ready when cell phone rings.

Laser surgery is now trusted and common practice

- But expensive, and can be risky.
- Lasers cut through steel, burn off skin moles and are weapons in Star Wars movies.
 - o Shoot them into my eyeball?
- Though lots of success...I don't know.
- What to do with almost 100 million Americans with presbyopia.

Another treatment – Transscleral Light Therapy.

- Uses low level of laser light
 - o Aimed at ciliary muscles (lens focus)
 - o Increases strength and flexibility
- Take 5 successive 10-minute sessions
- Happy patients have tossed their glasses.

Not here to argue which eye treatment is best.

The bottom line:

- Application of light sharpens our focus
- Light helps us see the world in a better way.

Today's text takes us to Jericho and introduces Bartimaeus.

- Blind beggar
 - o Easy to overlook and pass by.
 - o Credible part of the community because he had no way to earn a living.
 - o Purpose was in helping others give alms.

- A religious duty.

Jesus enters town with his group of selected disciples and self-defined insiders.

- He has attracted people who want to be identified with him.
- Mark does not say why: healed or taught
- People who want to be counted among those with Jesus.
- Interesting that those who are on the “inside”
 - Want to keep others on the “outside”
- In spite of all the teaching previous to this scene
 - Welcoming the children
 - First shall become last.
 - Most important is the servant of all.

When Bartimaeus learns that Jesus is passing by, he begins to shout toward Jesus and say,

- “Son of David, have mercy on me!”
 - He continues to shout even though some within the crowd rebuke him sternly and tell him to be quiet.
 - He responds by shouting more loudly!
- Remarkably, in Mark’s Gospel, Bartimaeus is the *first* and *only* person to address Jesus as “Son of David”
 - —a politically dangerous thing to do.
 - Implying that the son of a previous ruler would strive to take the throne from Herod.
- Up until this point in Mark’s Gospel, only demons have called him “Jesus of Nazareth” and “the Holy One of God” (1:23, 24).
- Bartimaeus believes he is in the presence of Israel’s Messiah
 - the Messiah whom Isaiah said will give sight to the blind.

The insiders tell Bartimaeus to keep quiet.

- Only when Jesus orders them to “Call him forward,”
- Those with Jesus suddenly become hospitable
- Almost sounding enthusiastic:
 - “Be encouraged; get up, he’s calling you.”

Bartimaeus response is priceless

- He jumps up and throws off his cloak, coming to Jesus.
 - Almost comical
 - How is he supposed to find his cloak again?
 - Might be his only possession and protection from the elements.
 - Does he have such faith that he knows he will gain his sight from Jesus?
 - That he can give up all he has?

Bartimaeus is the only one who could truly see Jesus.

- First, he knew to ask for mercy.
- Then he was able to ask for sight.
- Calls Jesus “Rabbi/Teacher”
- Healing him, Jesus connects Bartimaeus’ sight to his faith.
 - And Bartimaeus joins those following Jesus
- The blind beggar knew the message that we need to hear:
 - *Application of Light sharpens our focus on the world.*

Where are the places we need to give up our own sight and rely on the Light of truth from Jesus to help us to see?

- Does our own spiritual presbyopia keep us from seeing clearly the vision Jesus has for us?
- Do we rely too much on our own limited sight?

- Time for us to give up our sight and be healed by the Light of the Lord so that we can see in new ways.

When Jesus is the Light by which we view the world

- What does the world look like?
- How does it shape our morning routine?
 - o or the devotion or prayer time we cram in or fail to?

When we allow Jesus to open our eyes

- How do we view the morning news?
- Or line up the tasks for the day?

When you drive to work or daily errands you don't stare at the windshield, but look through it...

- How do you view others on the road through the lens of Jesus?

When we view our neighborhood, community and the wider world with the Light of Jesus

- it helps us to see more clearly
 - o guide the way we put our faith into action.
 - o It shapes the way we vote.

When we walk in the Light and look through the lens of Christ

- Demonstrate that we have given up seeing in conventional ways
- We see with the eyes of faith
 - o Focused on Christ and the continuing of his mission.

When Bartimaeus was healed by Jesus and given his sight, he followed Jesus the rest of the way.

Can we do any less?