

## Reflection for 24 October 2021—See, Give Thanks, and Follow

**Texts: Psalm 34 (Taste and See) and Mark 10: 46-52 The healing of Bar Timaeus**  
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**Please pray with me:** Holy One, may the words I write and the words that are read point to you alone. In Jesus name, Amen.

Today's gospel story is so important that it is told in all three synoptic gospels, with slight variations. In Matthew, the identical story reports the healing of two blind beggars. Mark and Luke say only one, and Mark identifies him by name—Bar Timaeus. Bar—son of—Timaeus. Luke ends the story with the man's gratitude, saying he glorified God and that **all** the people who saw it **also** praised God. And all three gospels report that the healed men or man then followed Jesus. They **See, Give Thanks, and Follow!**

Biblical scholars believe that the structure of the gospel of Mark is significant. In Chapter 8, another blind man is healed and his vision is blurry at first, THEN he sees. In Chapter 10, what we heard this morning, Bartimaeus is healed and **follows** Jesus. In between are a number of stories about discipleship, including the story of one who walked away sorrowfully, because he had too much stuff to abandon to follow Jesus. Or possibly, he was grieving about all the stuff he would be giving up because he WAS going to follow Jesus. Like a really good short story, we don't really know how that one turned out.

The blind stories are bookends pointing to the important mid-section of Mark's gospel, the section on discipleship. They seem to say, "Open your eyes and see what is really important." And Bartimaeus' story is the last one in this section on discipleship. He epitomizes what disciples are called to do: Open your eyes, **see, give thanks, and follow Jesus.**

The story of Bartimaeus is more of a "call" story than a miracle story. The word "call" is used three times.

In all three versions of the story, Jesus asks, "**What do you want me to do for you?**" It is a repeat of the same question recorded 15 verses earlier in Mark, in the

story about James and John having the nerve to ask Jesus to promise them the best seats when he comes into glory. They had introduced their request by asking Jesus to give them whatever they asked. Jesus was wise enough to ask first, “What is it you want me to do for you?” Here is the same question again, in the very next story, when Jesus responds to a cry for mercy coming to him from the edge of the very large crowd.

But instead of the arrogant demand to do whatever he asks, Bar Timaeus humbly begs for Jesus’ mercy. Jesus does not assume what Bartimaeus wants, but **asks** what that means. The difference in Bartimaeus’ response, compared to James’ and John’s request for **priority seating** is stunning! Bartimaeus wants to **see**.

I have always loved this story, as someone who has had troubles with my eyes from a very young age. In India, I had conjunctivitis so severe that my mother says the whites of my eyeballs (the sclera) had blisters that made them look like the white of a well-fried egg. The doctors had never seen a worse case in the impoverished Indian people with whom my dad served.

It plagued me right into elementary school. I remember going to kindergarten with a patch over my eye. My parents wouldn’t let me walk to school for fear I would get run over because I wasn’t seeing properly. And on one such day, with vision so distorted with one eye covered that I didn’t have my normal depth perception, I slammed my pinky in the car door. THAT is why I remember!

I wore glasses for myopia from 4<sup>th</sup> grade on and was not able to wear contacts because of my aversion to anything in my eye, from the earlier painful bouts of conjunctivitis. I had progressive bi-focal lenses while still in my 30s.

Several years ago, my eye doctor told me that the blood vessels feeding my retina suggest I am heading for conversion from my “dry” macular degeneration to blindness from neo-vascular macular degeneration and retinal tears, sooner rather than later. My new (young) optometrist in Paris says that is highly unlikely and that my cataract formation (likely due to sun exposure as a child in India) is progressing very slowly. Such good news! That announcement sent me home in great spirits—thanking

God that, at least for the next while, I will see. She thinks I have a long time to do what I love doing—**seeing, thanking, and following** Jesus in ministry!

Good stewardship is about **opening our eyes to God**, to **see God’s dream and vision**—then **gratefully serving Christ** to that end. In order to stay the course when the going gets rough, a compelling and passionate vision of the reign of God (the Kingdom of God) instills a sense of how **our purpose** and **God’s call** connect in our lives and the life of our community.

James and John’s vision of sitting on Jesus’ right (and left) hand was off the mark and inadequate. A vision of honour and position that puts “me-first” and elevates my views will not provide the kind of courage, compassion and creativity that lead us to faithfully love and serve God in both good times and in difficult times. It will not heal, transform and energize.

“Notice how Mark again reinforces the connection between seeing and understanding. Bartimaeus doesn’t say, “Healer, let me see” or “Miracle Man, let me see” or “Ophthalmologist, let me see.” He says “Teacher, let me see.” It is what Jesus **is teaching** that we are in danger of remaining blind to. It is what Jesus is teaching that he, and his gospel writer, are trying to open our eyes to.”<sup>1</sup> A message of **unconditional love and inclusivity**. I invite you to reflect on that in relation to the process in which EPUC is engaging to becoming an Affirming Community of Faith in The United Church of Canada.

While the disciples had not yet quite caught on to this, this blind beggar gets a sense of the immensity of what Jesus is saying and doing—and calling him to do. He is the first one to publicly name Jesus as “Son of David,” another way of calling him “Messiah.” Bartimaeus—even while still blind—caught a sense of God’s vision through Jesus. His joy at the opportunity to meet Jesus was so **great** that scripture tells us **he threw off his coat** as he got up and went.

There is symbolism in this that may be lost on us today. His coat was what he used to catch the coins that people tossed at him. Casting that off showed his great

faith that he would no longer need those meagre coins or that means of “earning” a living. He was giving away everything he had JOYFULLY—unlike the rich young man a couple stories earlier. Bart had caught the life-giving vision of Jesus—that he was loved and empowered in relationship with God, the **Vision-Giver**.

God’s life-giving purpose, vision, and love deeply energized, empowered and transformed Jesus. **Bartimaeus caught that vision**. And it is available to us, too, when we are spiritually healed to **see** the world through the lens of God’s vision and God’s intentions for what the world could be like.

That is where our stewardship connects. For the next thing that happens after catching God’s vision is to be grateful, then act on it.<sup>2</sup> As Christians, we follow Jesus who shows us the way to God’s kin-dom of Shalom, where all will be included, and all will have enough, the way God intended.

We do that by carrying out Christ’s ministries of preaching, teaching, healing, feeding, welcoming, and working for peace. We participate in those ministries in many ways and our **offerings** make them **financially** possible. Thanks for all you do to make that possible!

Bartimaeus had no doubt experienced what is sometimes referred to as a “dark night of the soul,” a place of great depth and gravity in the stillness of his blindness. By the time Jesus gave Bartimaeus his vision, Bartimaeus had already opened the eyes of his soul to the possibility that there could be so much more available to us—more love, more joy, more justice—through following Jesus into right relationship with God in community with our neighbours and all of creation. People whose eyes have been opened to see God’s vision look beyond our own immediate interests. Jesus told Bartimaeus his own faith had healed him; and Bartimaeus was eager and **ready** to follow.

**Seeing, giving thanks, and following Christ** to **be** in right relationship with God and with neighbour as God’s steward, not sporadically or just when he felt like it. I am imagining it became a way of being, a permanent lifestyle choice for him.

We have so much to celebrate in the **vision** God gives us to live gratefully, inclusively, and generously here in our East Plains U.C. faith community and in our community of Aldershot and beyond. **Thanks be** to God! Now let's **follow!!**

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph from "When It All Becomes Clear," A sermon on Mark 10:46-52 by Nathan Nettleton, 28 October 2012. © LaughingBird.net. Posted on PRCL-L on 27 October.

<sup>2</sup> Above 2 paragraphs inspired by Jan Bihl's stewardship sermon starters for 18 and 25 October 2009 at <http://www.united-church.ca/planning/theme/sermonstarters>. Unfortunately, no longer available.