

**The Risks of Seeing and Being Seen**  
**Mark 10:46-52**  
**First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**  
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Let's be honest. People like Bartimaeus make us nervous. After all, he was stepping outside of his place in their society. Mark identifies him as a blind beggar. This means he had a role. He likely had a place where he sat each day. He likely had friends or family who brought him there. There were likely, as we see in other stories in the gospels, questions about his blindness and its possible connection to sin. And, meanwhile, there were likely people who tossed him a coin as they passed by, who gave him an end of their loaf of bread.

And even though no one wanted to be Bartimaeus, they tolerated him, they even helped him. But they weren't sure what to do with him when he started shouting out to Jesus. After all, when he began to do this, he was disrupting the structures within which they all lived. He, the blind beggar, was expected to sit quietly by...perhaps to hope for sight, but certainly not to ask for it. He was expected to have to ask others what was happening rather than to proclaim it to them. He was expected not to know unless he was told.

And, yes in this story it says that "he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth," but then when he opened his mouth, it was Bartimaeus who claimed something about him. Just a few chapters earlier, after the healing of another blind man, Jesus asked the disciples who they said that he was. It is the familiar text where we hear Peter say, "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29, NRSV). In response Jesus says not to tell anyone.

But, here we are, Jesus' mission and ministry having developed to the point where we are nearing the end of his life. And now when Bartimaeus cries out, "Son of David," seemingly recognizing that the Messiah, the King was present...this time Jesus doesn't tell him to be quiet, but calls him over and asks what he can do for him.

And in that moment...in that question, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51, NRSV) Jesus not only publicly takes on that identity, but he shares power with Bartimaeus. In that moment, Jesus sees who Bartimaeus is and gives Bartimaeus the power to not only see him - after all even when he was blind Bartimaeus knew who Jesus was - but Jesus gives him the power to follow him.

Too often we read this story simply as another healing story. We sit in awe of Jesus. We name his power as a sign of his Messiahship. We celebrate with Bartimaeus as we imagine how much more full his life has become in this healing act.

But rarely do we stop and consider the risks that were all around this story.

Because it is often easier to just stay in the background...to not be noticed...to not draw attention to ourselves. As much as we might think that Bartimaeus must have been excited to hear Jesus call him over or to be asked what he wanted...when Jesus saw him, paid attention to him, really noticed him, that meant that Bartimaeus' life would be changed. And friends, change, even good change, is rarely easy, is rarely without risk.

When Jesus stopped and saw who Bartimaeus was, he then followed that up with asking who he could become.

And that's not all that was risky in this story.

Because when Bartimaeus opened up, when he asked to receive his sight, then he had a choice to make. It was one thing to be a blind beggar who listens to what everyone else is saying and is able to identify Jesus as the Son of David. It is another thing to receive his sight and in that act to receive the freedom to move about by himself and to make his own way, and then to follow Jesus.

See, in asking to be able to see, Bartimaeus didn't only get a physical sense back, but he got the chance to choose how he would be in relationship to Jesus. And he chose - even when given permission to "Go"...to go home...to go make a life...to go some place new - he chose to follow Jesus.

And, this is no small thing because do you realize what comes next? Chapter 10 ends saying, "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way" (Mark 10:52b, NRSV) and then chapter 11 begins with Jesus and the disciples in Bethphage where he instructs his disciples to go and find a colt who has never been ridden. And do you remember the rest of that story? Jesus enters Jerusalem at the beginning of the week, a week that ends in his death.

This is the Jesus who Bartimaeus saw, first with his heart and then with his eyes, and who Bartimaeus chose to follow.

So, what about us?

When are the times when no matter what decorum calls for...no matter what people around us expect...we just can't help but shout out?

Or, are we more likely to be the ones doing the quieting, the ones who are comfortable with the way things have always been, the ones who don't want the systems disrupted, the ones who toss a penny or scrap of food in hopes of shutting up those we have shut out?

And when Jesus looks at us, who does he see? What parts of ourselves are we willing to share? What are we trying to hide? And what will it take for us to become who he knows we can be...who we were created to be?

When he asks us what he can do for us, what do we ask for? Are we even willing to risk asking or do we want to fade back in the background?

And when Jesus shows us who he is, how do we respond? Do we go back to our quiet lives when we realize that following Jesus isn't about traipsing through the countryside admiring him as he feeds the crowds and heals the sick and hugs the children? Or are we willing to take the risk to follow Jesus even when he confronts the authorities and challenges our comfortable systems and in response finds himself hung on a cross?

Too often we like to romanticize what being a Christ-follower is all about. We talk about what we get out of it, what he did for us.

And yet this Lenten season reminds us that if we are willing to be honest...to see and be seen...to follow...we will discover that the way is fraught with challenge. Yes, it has joy and reward but they don't exist in a vacuum. Rather the joy of being Jesus' followers lives hand in hand with the risk and the challenge of living in Jesus' ways.

Friends, Jesus looks at each of us and knows us. And Jesus invites us to know him as well - not the Jesus we have created to make ourselves feel good, not the one we have created to let ourselves off the hook - but Jesus invites us to know his true self and to risk following.

That is the call of this season and of our faith. May it be a call we are willing to answer.

Amen.