

Facebook Live Worship

Mark 10:46-52

Rev. Kelley L. Becker

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, ^[a] let me see again." ⁵² Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

This story about Bartimaeus regaining his sight reminded me of the I-Spy jars and bottles that I've made with children over the years. Earlier this week, I posted a video on Facebook, suggesting families make I-Spy jars or bottles at home. Here is mine. Young people, if you made one, hold it up and have a grown-up take a picture of it and share it on Facebook. The jars contain some kind of grain or dried lentils, maybe some of you used sand, and then some small objects, like seashells, beads, feathers, and dice. When you slowly turn the jar, you can spy the little objects among the grain. I-Spy jars remind us that sometimes things get in the way or keep us from seeing everything there is to see. We shouldn't give up trying to see new things, though. We should keep trying to see and understand the world around us and the people with whom we share the world. Our lives are full of chances for us to see and experience all kinds of things and, as we do, we will change and learn and grow every day. So, keep your eyes open!

If you have an I-Spy jar, now is the time to settle in, slow down, and try to spy the items in it! If you don't have one yet, use this time to draw a picture. As you draw, hide something, like a heart or a question mark or your initials, in your picture. After worship, have your parents look for the what you have hidden in the picture! I would love to see your drawing when it's done. Take a picture and share it with all of us after the sermon.

When I young, my grandparents paid for my brother and me to have a Highlights magazine subscription. One of my favorite things about Highlights was that in every issue there was a hidden pictures page. It was a black and white drawing that held within it lots of little things for us to find. I always did that page first, before I read any of the stories. The Hidden Pictures pages, I-Spy, Where's Waldo, even word search puzzles, they all encourage us to slow down so that we might see something we don't see at first glance. When I spend time with our grandchildren, I observe that they notice things about the world that I'm either too tall, too busy, or too distracted to see. When they were here for Thanksgiving, John and I enjoyed walking with them through our neighborhood as they amassed quite a collection of treasures along the way. I am certain most of those treasures had been there long before they arrived, but we hadn't noticed even though we walk our neighborhood every day.

Like children who see things we don't, Bartimaeus, though he was blind, was able to see things more clearly than even Jesus' closest friends. Throughout the Gospel of Mark, the author writes about how Jesus' disciples, over and over again, were shown and told what the kin-dom of God is like, but they didn't see it, they didn't understand. They sat with Jesus as he ate with tax collectors and other people nobody wanted to eat with. They looked on as he cast demons out of a guy who lived in a cemetery, alienated from the rest of the community, and they watched him make a habit of pointing out the worth of the ones who were most vulnerable; women, children, people who were poor, and sick. He did all of this under the big umbrella of: THIS IS WHAT THE KIN-DOM OF GOD LOOKS LIKE PEOPLE.

And yet, as Jesus walked into Jericho, Bartimaeus, a man who was more vulnerable than most, cried out to Jesus and he was told to shut up. Kids, don't say that at home. Bartimaeus didn't shut up though, he cried out louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Note, this is the first time the author of Mark used this name for Jesus, "Son of David." This is an important shift. The author wanted readers to notice that this man who couldn't see *saw* something that the disciples, the ones who had spent the most time with Jesus, didn't. "Son of David" is a change from the title "Son of Man," which Mark primarily used. By calling Jesus "Son of David," Bartimaeus' tied him to the people's hope of a long-awaited

Messiah who they expected to come as a king from the line of David to restore Israel and make everything right.

The contrast between Bartimaeus and the disciples is pretty striking. Bartimaeus saw Jesus as the instrument through which the world would know God and the disciples, having spent all that time with Jesus, watching him, interacting with him, listening to him, still tried to keep Bartimaeus on the outside. They tried to keep him from Jesus. It's pretty incredible. You would think they would have looked at man begging on the side of the road and said, "You are Jesus' kind of people." I don't know why they tried to keep Bartimaeus at arm's length. I bet if confronted they might have said, "Well, there are a lot of people around. We don't want Jesus to be overwhelmed. He's got a lot on his plate." I have to wonder, though, did they try to keep Bartimaeus away from Jesus because he was differently-abled, or poor, or because he was dirty? I ask because in Mark's story, just a few verses back, we read that the disciples argued amongst themselves about which one of them was the greatest. Clearly, in Mark's story, these characters were willing to be part of a system based on the assumption that some people are worth more than others. That's a world thing, that's not a kin-dom of God thing.

So, the picture the author painted of the disciples is not terribly flattering. They were a mess. I'm guessing the followers of Jesus in Mark's community a generation later were afflicted with that same propensity to be a mess. And guess what? Not that much has changed. We are a mess, some of us at any given moment more than others. You know who you are. Anyway, don't you think, so much of the time, we have the same trouble *seeing* and understanding things that the disciples did?

And maybe the things we have the most trouble seeing are glimpses of what the kin-dom of God is like. We are too busy, too cynical, too blind to notice. But friends, these glimpses of the world as God imagined it, they are called miracles. A blind man able to see just like that, would be a miracle for sure. But most miracles are way more subtle than that. Miracles are moments when darkness fades to light. Miracles turn our attention to what really matters in life and in death. Miracles point us beyond what is in front of us to the One who made us, whose image is imprinted in everyone ever born. And here's the truth, miracles are all around us and Covid-19 can't change that. But, if we let it, it can keep us from

seeing them. The anxiety and fear we are experiencing can cloud our vision and make us believe there is only darkness. But that isn't reality. It is real that Covid-19 is easily spread and that we can spread it even when we aren't having symptoms. It is real that there is a shortage of medical supplies and our children are not in school learning and some of us are struggling financially and our country is still more divided than ever. It is important for us to be mindful of all of this, so that we can ease suffering where we can. But there is more to see.

There are miracles all around us. People are recovering. Some of us are sewing masks to keep the ones who are vulnerable safe. Neighbors are putting teddy bears on their front porches and in their windows so families can go on bear hunts. We are asking the people next-door if they need anything and offering to go get it. Friends are recording birthday greetings for their friends' children to celebrate special days that don't feel so special. Most importantly, right now, we are staying home. It's not easy, and frankly, staying away from each other seems, in so many ways, the opposite of what Jesus taught. But right now, empty streets, empty offices, empty stores, empty churches, are all miracles, they are all glimpses of what the kin-dom of God is like. But it will not be that way forever. Easter is coming!!

We are experiencing a lot of change all at once...changes in the world, our community, our neighborhoods, our homes, and ourselves. I will say, I like some of the changes in me. I like the me that intentionally de-centers myself and places the safety and health of other people first. I like the me that values connection more than I ever thought. What have you noticed about yourself? How have you changed? Do you like what you see? Is there something you could change today that would help you navigate the week ahead? If so, do it!

The story of Bartimaeus ends with his sight restored and his decision to follow Jesus on the way. I wonder, as we see new things about ourselves and the world each day, will we find that we seek the ways of Jesus more intentionally? That's where our hope lies, I think. I will leave you with this, the ways of Jesus are entirely based on community and prioritizing what is best for the whole over what is best for one. This week, and in the weeks to come, let us consider how our community could be changed if a whole bunch of us begin to live our lives focused on that. Maybe we can take seriously Mahatma Gandhi's wisdom and "Be the change that you wish to see in the world." Amen.