

Last Sunday's dedication of Camp Kirkwood, the joint Christian camping ministry of Lehigh and Philadelphia Presbytery, turned into sermon preparation when I got home and began to prepare for today.

A worship service at camp would not be complete without camp songs, and one of the all-time greats goes like this: "Blind Man stood by the road and he cried, Blind Man stood by the road and he cried, Blind man stood by the road and he cried, he cried, oh, oh, oh, show me the way, show me the way, show me the way, the way to go home." The following verses ask Jesus to show me the truth, the life, and then we have Jesus declaring that "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life, and the way to go home."

"Blind Man" does a marvelous job of interpreting who Jesus is through what Jesus does. It sings us from sight to insight, and it invites us this morning as we look once again at this very familiar story to move from sight to insight and gain a richer appreciation for who Jesus is through what Jesus does.

Once again, as we consider our Life Style, we are faced with the question, *Mark 10:51 (NRSV) "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."*

What do we want? New life is ours so we can offer a beggar's gift.

I. New life

The blind man has a name; Bartimaeus. He has a family; he is the son of Timaeus, which is curious because that is the literal meaning of Bartimaeus = son of Timaeus. It is as though his identity was all he had left so he held on to it fiercely.

Scripture doesn't tell us how Bartimaeus lost his sight. Perhaps it gradually dimmed over time due to illness; perhaps it was lost in a terrible moment due to an accident.

We don't know he lost his sight, but we do know the consequences of his loss. If he had a career, gone. If he had a good reputation, lost. If he was somebody, he was nobody. Everything that made his life meaningful and worthwhile, all that motivated him to wake up in the morning vanished. His new identity was the blind beggar who sat in his robe by the side of the road and cried out to passersby, "Alms for the poor. Alms for the poor."

Did he feel shame about his plight? Everyone knew that good fortune was a sign of God's blessing, so ill fortune was a sign of God's judgment. His sin had found him out and left him by the side of the road.

He was in a dark place, and not just because he was blind. He was in a dark place, because he had no hope. He wasn't living; he was existing, and on those lean days when few shekels were thrown his way; on those hard days when the price of generosity was judgment and condemnation, the darkness was overwhelming and he wished that it would all just end.

But it didn't. One day ended. Another day began. Until that day; he was in his usual spot when he heard something new. Jesus was on his way. He'd heard about Jesus; he was the talk of the town and if there is one thing a blind beggar can do, he can listen.

He heard. He knew. Jesus was coming.

A crowd gathered. Word got around. And Bartimaeus felt something new; he felt hope. Jesus could restore his sight. Jesus could give him new life. Jesus could take away his shame and give his life meaning and purpose.

Mark 10:47 (NRSV) "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The crowd wasn't pleased. They couldn't hear what Jesus was saying. "Bartimaeus, be quiet! We don't want to hear you; we want to hear Jesus."

Mark 10:47 (NRSV) "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus heard him. Jesus saw him; not as a beggar; not as someone to look down on; Jesus saw him as an equal, as a child of God.

Mark 10:51 (NRSV) "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."

We know the outcome; we know that Jesus restored his sight, and the temptation is to treat this as a very nice story; Jesus made the blind man see; isn't that nice? But, "isn't that nice" minimizes what Jesus did; it oversimplifies this miracle.

Jesus didn't just give him his sight back; Jesus gave him his life back. His identity was the blind beggar by the side of the road; his new life was a follower of Jesus Christ. He didn't just get his sight back and then go back to his home and his old way of life. He followed Jesus from Jericho to Jerusalem to Calvary to cross and resurrection.

You see, there is a message in this and every healing. A message that is much more than "isn't that nice? Wasn't Jesus a really nice guy?"

The classic camp song sings the message, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life, and the way to go home." It sings from sight to insight.

Jesus is the Son of God. We see that in these miracles; and, the Son of God has come to set this world right. Sickness and pain, sorrow and loss, grief and despair, these all too human experiences have no place in God's good creation, but they occupy a far too prominent place in our lives.

God doesn't accept that. God sends the Son to set His creation right, and Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to do just that; He will confront sin and evil in all their horror and conquer them with the power that sin and evil can never defeat; the power of love.

Bartimaeus saw that; the blind man saw that. He saw Jesus for who he was; "Son of David" is a Messianic title; "Son of David" means that all of Israel's hopes and dreams are fulfilled in this man, Jesus.

Bartimaeus saw that; Bartimaeus believed that; and Bartimaeus received new life; new life as a follower of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of God.

And before he could see, before he received new life, before he followed, Bartimaeus offered a beggar's gift.

2. A Beggar's Gift

There is more to Bartimaeus's story than we will ever know. His name is in the Bible! His story is in the Bible! There are so many anonymous people in the Bible, but not Bartimaeus. We know his name.

That suggests to me that the early Church knew his name; they knew him; he was one of their leaders. His journey with Jesus post-resurrection is hidden from us, but it made its mark on the early church.

We know that he offered a beggar's gift. He was there by the side of the road. He was there with nothing, nothing, except his name and his robe.

Bartimaeus's robe may be the key to the whole story; it was his everything; it kept him warm; it sheltered him in the storm; it was the tool of his trade; a beggar's robe was what he used to beg; it collected the coins; it demonstrated his deplorable state; a beggar's robe defined him as a beggar.

So when Jesus calls Bartimaeus to come to him, Bartimaeus answers the call by jumping up, throwing off his robe, and coming to Jesus. In so doing, he is offering Jesus his entire identity, his entire way of life; Bartimaeus holds nothing back.

And at this point he is still blind. He has given everything before he receives anything. His faith in Jesus is such that he believes that he can give it all to Jesus and Jesus will not let him down.

Bartimaeus is all in; that is a beggar's gift; the gift of commitment; the gift of responding to the new life Jesus gives without holding anything back. New life results in a new life style; a life style that follows Jesus; a life style that is committed to Jesus' mission to make this world new and set things to right: No more sickness. No more sorrow. No more death, destruction, and fear. No more.

On November 8, we will have the opportunity to make our commitment. We have work to do; we have a role to play in God's mission of making all things new here in Reading, here in Berks County, and here in South Sudan; and, people are depending on us; beggars by the side of the road are calling to us. We have work to do, and we have received new life; we have received the capacity to do what Jesus calls us to do; so on November 8, commit yourself to a life style that offers a beggar's gift. Amen.