

**MARK 10: 46-52**

**BLIND BARTIMAEUS**

OCTOBER 28, 2012

This is Reformation Sunday

and I DO want to move to the text in a minute

While there is no clear link between the Reformation and this particular text, I want to raise up some Reformation principles so you can either learn them, be reminded of them, and in whatever ways make sense to you in your own spiritual life, you can bring them to the rest of this service and to this text as well. Who knows how the Spirit may speak??

The Reformation is and was a 16<sup>th</sup> century movement within the church universal. At that time the church as an institution had become rigid and self-absorbed, as institutions do. I want to make it very, very clear that if we were to misunderstand and see this as a "Roman Catholic versus Protestant" issue, we would be doing a profound disservice to the Reformation itself and to the Spirit of God who continues to reform the church in every denomination.

Phyllis Tickle (I've told you about her before) says that since its inception, the church has gone through an upheaval roughly every 500 years. She says every 500 years we have a huge garage sale, and get rid of stuff that once served us well but no longer does. The reformation was one of those garage sales.

At that time (we're talking 1500s now) the church had moved away from its heart in the heart of Jesus, and his way of peace, justice and radical inclusivity. As we do, over and over.

Along came people like Martin Luther who, flawed and very human, called for reform. High among the principles of the Reformation were:

*sola scriptura*

salvation/justification by faith  
the priesthood of all believers.

Just hold those in your heart and mind now

and let me move on to remind you of the book of Mark again, how it came to be and what it is we're reading. We've only got a few more weeks in Mark before Advent begins and we begin the year of Luke.

(go over the history.....Jesus says he's coming again...they don't write things down....some begin to die off....gospels written....Mark the first written of our four....passion narrative with a long introduction....

watch how Mark writes this.

For 8 chapters we've been reading about how Jesus taught, what he did, how he treated people....now it's coming to the crunch. This is the very centre of the Gospel, literally. Chapter 8 of 16. Mark is no fool. We're getting to the heart, the centre of it.

For the next two chapters Jesus is going to be blunt with them, prepare them as well as he can for what's coming because in Chapter 11 they get to Jerusalem, he rides in on a donkey – and we're off.

So what happens right now is really, really important. He brackets this part with two stories of healing from blindness. Coincidence? I don't think so. He's going to try to tell his followers exactly what's going to happen, what they need to do and who he needs them to be.

They don't get it. Three times he tells them; three times they misunderstand.

So to see this section bracketed by stories of healing from blindness just makes you go – oh yea. He's good. Mark is good in how he writes and how he tells us things without spelling them out. Does that make sense?

So let's read the first story of healing from blindness first:

(8: 22- 26)

I wish I were preaching on that one....why did he take him outside the town and why tell him not to go back there? So many questions so little time!!!

Ok, so then we have the whole section...he asks them who do people say I am...he tells them three times that he'll die and three times they don't understand – not only do they not understand but they, almost cartoon-like, start fighting about who is the greatest.

And then, just before they enter Jerusalem – the healing of a blind man again.

(10: 46-52)

There are so many interesting ways to approach this – today I'd like you to hear it again, and while I'm reading it, notice if you will, with whom you identify most. I'll read it, try to think your own way into this scene.....

Now I'm going to read it again. This time, what character, or characters, represent the church do you think?

The message of the passage is very different, isn't it – depending on whose eyes (!! ) we see it through.

I'd suggest, for what it's worth, that when you're reading scripture on your own, or with friends, that you take this approach once in a while. Read it, taking the part of one character, then another, ask yourself for each – where's the good news? Where's the warning? Where's the grace?

Before we go farther with that, a bit of background on blindness. To be blind in Jesus' day was to be unclean. It wasn't only a physical disability that left you with no means of support, but it also made you a social and religious outcast. The Bible says in Leviticus 21 that those with physical defects would be unable to make an offering to God.

So....this is to say that Bartimaeus was someone who was blind – and this would mean that he could no longer worship in the temple....he would be shunned, and probably considered responsible for his own condition. Many would feel that the reason he was blind was that God had punished him.

He sat by the side of the road, begging. I don't know if he was pushy about that, loud and if the people would cross the road so he couldn't hear them and make them uncomfortable....we're not told about that but what we DO know is that when he heard Jesus was coming he started to yell. Loudly. They told him to be quiet. (like they had told the children only a chapter ago) and he yelled even more loudly. I like Bartimaeus. I like him a lot. He won't be quiet. He won't just accept whatever food voucher they feel they can give without compromising their security, and be thankful and go away. He knows what he needs and he won't stop. I'm so glad about that. Good for him.

Shhh they say. Don't bother Jesus he has a busy schedule. Shh you are embarrassing us.

Is that us?

Are we the ones shhhing Bartimaeus?

What would the passage read like if we were the crowd? If we read it through, so to speak, those eyes?

The church is sometimes guilty of hearing the cries of those who are most in need and saying Shhh.

Can this text be a warning to us.....a question: IS this you? IS this us? ARE you like this? And we hang our heads, and say “forgive us, yes, we sometimes are.”

But listen – that's not the end. For us, for Bart, or for the crowd.

THIS IS SO EXCITING, LISTEN TO THIS!!

Jesus is always showing us how much HIS faith saves us. How he can reform the church and remold us and move us from a crowd of shh-sayers into.... into what?

Jesus knew the crowd – his followers had told Bartimaeus to be quiet. BUT he knew that they could change. Still, this late in the story, he has faith in them. He knew they could be his voice, the voice of life and love to Bart as much as they had been the voice of silence and death just a moment before.

WATCH THIS!

Instead of calling Bart himself,  
he could easily have done that  
he says to them

CALL HIM HERE

The very crowd that just finished silencing him are now told to call him here.  
And they did.

They did.

WHO REALLY GOT THEIR SIGHT BACK HERE????

the crowd, who have walked by a blind man and been embarrassed by his overt need....  
that crowd had its eyes opened and all of a sudden, sees Bart as someone worthy – important – as  
SOMEONE.

Because Jesus spoke his name. Because of Jesus' attention, the crowd has its eyes opened to see him in  
a new way.

AND because Jesus speaks to them and asks them to call him, and believes they can and they will....  
This is grace.  
This is the good news.  
This is the priesthood of all believers.

No matter what we've been in the past, no matter what mistakes we've made as individuals or as a  
church;  
still he needs us and asks us to do what's right and believes we can and believes we will.

Salvation by faith yes. **God's faith in us.**

**God has faith in us. Jesus never gives up – not even this close to his death, not even after they and we  
have misunderstood time and time again;  
together we can be his body.**

**To hear the cries of those for whom the systems of this world have been oppressive and forced them  
into the streets.**

**To hear the cries;  
to know the world can be better than this;  
to know that God calls us and trusts us to make it so;**

**who gives us sight to see the promise and the possibility and the dream of God;**

**and to live it into being.**

**Let's see what happens!!!**

**Amen.**