

Sozo

By: Jon Heerboth

October 24, 2021. Jon Heerboth preaches today on Jesus healing the blind man in Mark 10, the Greek word "sozo," and how we can be tempted to try and find our place in the story.

Reading: [Mark 10:46-52](#)

*** Transcript ***

"Come bring your burdens to God. Come bring your burdens to God. Come bring your burdens to God, for Jesus will never say no." That's a little hymn from the new "All Creation Sings" worship supplement that we've been looking at a little bit around here. It's from South Africa. As the earth spins on its axis every Sunday, people all around the world are reading the gospel lesson, getting together to worship and praise God, and ask God for healing and for faith to survive. It's nice to know that we join in with people all over the world as our time comes on Sunday mornings. It makes us feel like we are part of a much larger enterprise than just Christ Lutheran Church. It's fun to think about that.

These words again from the gospel reading: then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "Rabbouni, my teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has made you well." Immediately the blind man regained his sight and followed him on the way.

I enjoy watching movies. I wouldn't call myself a movie buff or an expert on film by a long shot, but I can get wrapped up in a movie that has a message or an ambiguous ending. It doesn't have to be a "happily ever after" ending. But in one sense, the stories in the Bible, at least a lot of them, are like movies. Some of them have complete endings. Others of them do not. Time and time again, we read of people being healed by Jesus, never to come on these same people again. Bartimaeus, in our gospel lesson today, was a person like that. He's a good example of what I'm talking about here. Jesus healed his blindness, and Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way. That's all we know — nothing more about a new life for him or what he did to serve his healer or his Lord after that.

But maybe that's good. Sometimes happy ending stories can be more troublesome than open-ended ones, because they just don't seem real. That's because you and I know too many people in the community of faith, perhaps even here at Christ Lutheran Church, for whom happiness and living a whole and good life do not represent the end of their stories. The happy ending is elusive. I wonder if happy endings can sometimes make us forget that we need to rely solely upon the grace of God, or that we in the church, in this place, are really living out our lives on this side of the ultimate happy ending — in other words, eternal life in heaven. Perhaps we will see that more clearly as we take a closer look at this story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus.

It's hard to miss the place of today's gospel in the timeline of Jesus' life. Between Mark's recounting of the first time Jesus healed a blind man in Bethsaida in chapter 8, and this story at the end of chapter 10, Jesus predicted his suffering and death three times; Peter confessed that Jesus is Lord; Peter, James, and John went to the mountaintop and saw Jesus transfigured; and then Jesus explained to the rich man — a man the text said Jesus loved — how he might obtain eternal life by selling all he had, giving it to the poor, and coming to follow Jesus. When the rich man heard the cost of being a follower of Jesus, he walked sadly away. Throughout Mark's gospel, Jesus is always looking for followers. But after he explained the potential cost of discipleship, even his own disciples asked how it was possible for

anyone to be saved. Jesus explained that for mortals, it is impossible — but not for God. With God, nothing is impossible.

So this story is sandwiched between Jesus' third passion prediction and the start of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The story of blind Bartimaeus actually stands on its own here. So Bartimaeus sits along the side of the way leading from Jericho to Jerusalem. It's about an eight-hour walk through pretty rough country, from well below sea level to well above it. As he gets wind of the fact that Jesus is about to pass by, Bartimaeus cries out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Bartimaeus seems to know who Jesus is, in a way that the others do not. The crowd tried to hush him, and the disciples ignored him or pretended they didn't even hear him. He was just a wayside blind beggar of no importance. And I'll bet there were many such people along the way. He continued to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." And what does Jesus do? He stands still. The blind man's need and his call for help cause Jesus to stop in his tracks. Only at Jesus' command did his disciples tell the man to come and stand before Jesus. And as Mark tells it, his response was really energetic: he tossed off his cloak, probably jumped up, and almost ran to Jesus. Jesus asked Bartimaeus then, "What do you want me to do for you?" And Bartimaeus said, "Rabbi, teacher, let me see again." And Jesus said, "Go, your faith has made you well." And immediately the man recovered his sight and followed Jesus.

Did you catch the irony? Look at the contrast between the way the disciples treated Jesus as opposed to this blind man. It's clear that Jesus had had a serious communication problem with James and John. They had asked him for special treatment. They could see Jesus only in terms of the value of their culture. They were blind in a spiritual sense — every bit as Bartimaeus was blind, physically. Again, the irony of it all? Jesus is preparing to enter Jerusalem to begin his passion and death as he continues to walk down the road. He's accompanied by a blind man who sees the way of Jesus even though they had never met before. And his seeing disciples, who were with Jesus day after day, they could not see Jesus for what he was. They were blind to everything but their own need. The same was true with the rich man. When Jesus told him he had to sell all of his land, all he had, give the money to the poor and follow him, the man was shocked, and left grieving.

When I was about 11, we got a hand-me-down TV from a neighbor. I will tell you that was a big day. It barely worked, but we thought it was wonderful. And I certainly watched my share. After church and Sunday dinner, I would want to watch TV. But there was nothing on other than TV preachers and faith healers, so I watched them. Many of us probably remember those guys. They put on a pretty good show for the times. One central tenet of their spiel was that the person who needed healing had to have faith. No faith, no healing. Naturally, everyone professed faith sufficient to move mountains, and the healing, the so-called healing, proceeded for better or for worse. Do you remember those guys? They'd come up, couldn't hear too well. The guy would box the ears. Another guy would shove him in the forehead. Down they'd go, presumably healed after they took the casts off after all that. But it was quite a show, very entertaining. And I know that those guys were financially very successful, if that's what you're looking for. But it always left me wondering whether people who were blind or people with other disabilities simply lacked the faith necessary for healing.

In today's lesson, Jesus told Bartimaeus that his faith had made him well. But I think we can give that philosophy a resounding no. I think that that "making him well" is an unfortunate translation of what happened to Bartimaeus. In Greek, the word is "sozo." I printed and put it here for your edification: sozo. Bartimaeus was sozoed by Jesus. That word can mean "heal" all right, but it also means "saved." When Jesus was talking about how hard it is for a rich person to enter the kingdom, the disciples asked: then who can be saved? Sozoed was the word they used. In Mark chapter 13, he who endured till the

end will be saved, sozoed. In Mark 16 the one who believes and is baptized will be saved. Sozoed. Here Jesus called Bartimaeus and told him that his faith had saved him, sozoed him. Jesus saved Bartimaeus because he recognized Bartimaeus' faith, and Jesus called him. Jesus also saw his physical need and had compassion on him. He saw the uniqueness in Bartimaeus that required a special act of grace, and he gave him that grace. By his death and resurrection, Jesus does the same for us. Bartimaeus did not regain sight because of some amount of faith that he showed or anything that he did. The healing, like his and our salvation, was purely a gift of God.

It's tempting to try to find our place in this story. Here we could easily imagine ourselves in the crowd around Jesus, annoyed by the needs of some of the people in our communities. I'm even tempted to suggest that we sit next to Bartimaeus and cry out for healing ourselves. Or maybe it would be better for us to sit with the gospel writer Mark and get involved in the ongoing struggle of trying with the disciples to fully understand the teaching of Jesus and the heartbreaking experience of watching his walk to the cross. Maybe that would be good. Maybe it would help us understand how we at times see others and their needs without truly seeing them as valued parts of God's creation. In other words, we allow our own concerns about ourselves to blind us to one another's needs.

This miracle starts with a social outcast sitting alongside the way, and ends with a new disciple following Jesus on the way to the cross. When Jesus looked for followers, he never looked around to find the most upstanding and presentable people to tell others about him. That should be a comfort to us all. Mark includes Gentiles, Pharisees, tax collectors, sinners and now Bartimaeus, because disabilities marginalize people, too.

Believe it or not, there's a happy ending to this gospel story. A blind beggar is called. He's made a model of faith and he's given sight. And then he became a follower. That's also what happens to us. God's action of love in Christ's death and resurrection calls us to faith, sozos us here at the font, gives us sight, and makes us his disciples. This new vision gives us the capacity to see others and their needs. Freed from concern about eternity, we can live out our vocations to care for all of God's creation and all of God's creatures, so that all may find Christ in their lives too. Meeting our Lord, as did Bartimaeus, changes our limited vision, opens our eyes, and starts us off following in Jesus' way.

So, who among us can truly see? Who among us needs a miracle? And who among us is able to pray appropriately for that miracle to take place? Those of us still living on this side of the happily ever after follow Jesus on his and not our way. In our hymn today, we will pray for health for ourselves and our friends. We will also sing that we understand that it is sin and the brokenness of the world that is at the root of all of our collective pain. And we pray that the spiritual oneness of our Christian community will spread from us here at Christ Lutheran Church, to reach all of humankind.

In the name of the father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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