

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“On the Way”

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Mark 10:46-52

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, 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.

At a dinner party, a college professor was confronted by an interested colleague. The colleague asked the professor, “Do you mind if I ask you a question about Joe Harris? I see that he is one of your students.” Without hesitation, the professor responded back, “I don’t mind if you ask a question. But first let me tell you that Joe Harris attends one of my classes. He is by no means however one of my students.” Clearly the professor saw a difference in attending classes and in being a student.

A couple of weeks ago I was trying to lead a stranger to Novi from our church building to a luncheon meeting at one of our fine restaurants along Novi Road near the mall. I gave her what I thought were clear instructions, “Just follow me.” I didn’t think anything else was needed. On the way I was prepared to slow down at stoplights so we would not get separated. On the way I was certain to use my turn signal to give her plenty of time to switch lanes or to make a turn. On the way I drove the posted speed limit so I would not be too fast or too slow. But something went wrong. As I turned from Meadowbrook Road to Nine Mile Road, I lost my follower in the rearview mirror. It seemed that she was too willing to let other traffic come between us. Although there seemed to be plenty of time for her to turn on the yellow light, she chose to wait and aggravate her leader. Twice I had to pull over to the side of the road and simply wait for her to catch up. When we finally got to the restaurant I walked over to her car and asked what I thought was an obvious question, “Did you have any problems following me?” The woman replied, “Oh, was I supposed to be following you?”

In this morning’s Scripture lesson, Jesus is on the road again with his disciples. As Mark tells the story it seems like the journey never ends. Mark says that they are now headed for Jericho but at this point in the story we know that Jesus is really headed toward his final destination-Jerusalem and the cross. The group is accosted by a blind man named Bartimaeus, who begs to be healed. Having heard that the Jesus motorcade is about to pass, Bartimaeus sits beside the road waiting for his opportunity to speak. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The people around him are angry, some a bit embarrassed for the man. They tell him to be quiet lest he ruin everyone else’s experience of Jesus. But Jesus calls for Bartimaeus to come forward and throwing off his cloak he jumps to his feet and approaches Jesus enthusiastically.

Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Now, if you were paying attention to last week’s sermon, you will find those words very familiar. When James and John came to Jesus to ask for personal greatness, Jesus asked the same question, “What do you want me to do for you?”

James and John wanted to sit at his right hand and left hand in glory. Bartimaeus wants something else. He simply wants to see. While Jesus ignored the request of James and John, he responded to the plea of Bartimaeus. "Go," he says, "your faith has made you well." Bartimaeus immediately receives his sight and then begins to follow Jesus along the road. He began to follow him on the way- on the way to wherever Jesus was going.

Of all the people that Jesus healed, Bartimaeus may have been the only one who got up and followed Jesus on the way. Because of that I have to believe that this story is something more than an ordinary healing story. It is something more than a miracle. It is a story about discipleship. This story teaches us that discipleship is not just about believing in Jesus but is about following Jesus. This is a story that tells us that our discipleship is practiced in how we choose to follow Jesus after we have encountered him and while we are on the way in the struggles and issues of our life.

A Sunday School teacher writes about teaching a sixth grade class where the topic was the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus. About half way through the class the hand of a young man named Bradford shot up. "I wanna know where was the rest of them?" The teacher was puzzled. "The rest of who, Bradford?" "Them followers, where was they when things got rough for Jesus?" The teacher answered, "The disciples? Oh, they were long gone by then." Bradford went on, "No, the rest of them. Where were they? What ever became of all of them that he helped, the ones he healed? Now they had two good legs to walk, two good eyes to see. Where were they when them soldiers came to get Jesus?" The teacher replied, "I don't know Bradford." "Yeah, you do," Bradford said softly. "They was just like most folks. They got what they wanted. Now they was gone."

Perhaps Bradford really had it right about church. Instead of being a place that creates and send forth disciples, too often we are a place where we gather to feel good about ourselves and one another. Instead of a place that challenges us to serve, the local congregation is a place that serves us. Instead of being a place that inspires risk and change, the church has become the greatest example of the status quo and the chief bearer of tradition for tradition's sake.

This past week I watched on the Independent Film Channel, Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*. I hadn't seen it in years and enjoyed a few good laughs. In one scene Brian and his mother are walking through a courtyard and are accosted by a beggar pleading, "Alms for an ex-leper, alms for an ex-leper please!" Brian is a little confused and asks, "What do you mean an ex-leper?" The man responds, "Well, I was cured by that Jesus fellow. Now I have a hard time making a living. All I've ever known to do is to beg." Unfortunately in many cases, an encounter with Jesus, even a miracle, didn't change a thing about the person.

As we approach our celebration of Consecration Sunday in November, now it is good time to examine and consider how your encounter with the presence of the Christ here in this place has left you changed. How have you been healed by the prayers and kind actions of those around you? How have you been felt the presence of God warm your heart through a word or a song? How have you found the revelation of God while studying the Scripture or teaching our children the stories of the people of faith? How has your participation in the worship, fellowship, education and service here at Meadowbrook Congregational Church made you different or moved you closer to God?

At first glance this may not seem to be a stewardship story. The healing of a blind man has little to do with how we use our time, our talents, and our treasure- does it? Well, perhaps so! The stewardship of God's gifts implies that we view the blessings of our life in a different way than we did before. What once we took for granted, what once we used for our own personal convenience and comfort, what once we gave only our leftovers back to God- we now give in prime importance. We give as we follow the example of Jesus on the way of our lives, each and every day.

After restoring his sight, it is interesting to note that Jesus tells Bartimaeus "to go." Bartimaeus doesn't just go home and live as he always had before. He doesn't run off to his friends and share the good news of his good fortune. No, when Bartimaeus "goes," he gets up and follows Jesus on the way of life. From that point on he is a faithful disciple, one who has cast off his doubts and misgivings to follow Jesus in seeking and building lasting things, seeing his healing as a call to serve the one who has healed him, interpreting his new vision as the opportunity to serve others so that they may see.

William Willimon writes that the difference between following Jesus and believing in Jesus is similar to the difference in some common things of life: the difference between dating and marriage, the difference between being a tourist and being a resident, the difference between renting a house and owning a home, the difference between being in love and being engaged to be married, and finally the difference between preparing to preach and preaching a sermon.

The point Willimon was trying to make is that like Bartimaeus, our proclaimed faith in Jesus needs to have changed us. Something needs to be different about us. Jesus wasn't looking for someone to merely agree with his teachings. Jesus wasn't looking for someone to admire his social action. Jesus wasn't looking for someone to simply believe in what he said and did. Jesus was looking for people to follow him on the way of their lives, on the way to sacrifice, service, and the giving of oneself for the love of God and others.

Perhaps we are not healed with the kind of dramatic change that came over Bartimaeus. But as God's people in this place, we have been touched by the presence of God. And time and time again God's ordinary people no longer just normal, walk with Jesus on the way, and are asked to offer evidence of their faith. The way of discipleship is not only a path of benefit but it is a path of demand and challenge. Following Jesus, we don't just count our blessings. Following Jesus we carefully consider our response to blessing. We walk with him on the way.

As we prepare for the season in which we contemplate our gifts to God, we should know that whatever we give in time, in talent, in treasure, and in service-whatever we give should reflect the sincerity of our walk with Christ. In these next two weeks, please carefully and prayerfully consider what you are called to do as you follow Jesus along the way.