Eyes Wide Open
Mark 10: 46 – 52
A sermon by Rev. Dr. David Clark
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I swallowed hard when the eye surgeon told me that if something went wrong in the procedure I needed, it could cause permanent blindness. My mind spiraled through scenarios. What if I did go blind? How would I function? What would I miss seeing the most? Can you imagine if you suddenly went blind? Just the thought makes you stop taking your vision for granted. But even if we were to lose our sight today, we would have a far easier time than poor old Bartimaeus from our story.

The Unbearable Darkness of Blindness

In Jesus' day, the blind, the outcasts, and the diseased were pushed to the edges of society, forced to beg for survival. There was no disability insurance, no school for the blind, no guide dogs—only the rough dirt of Jericho's outskirts and the hope that someone might "have mercy" and toss them a few coins.

Most people believed blindness was a curse: "You're blind because God doesn't like you." Bartimaeus might have protested, "But I was blind from birth." And they'd say, "Well, your parents must have done something bad then." It's easier to cast blame than to think for one moment, "There, but by the grace of God, go I."

Bartimaeus lived at the roadside—a beggar with nothing but a cloak. That cloak was his shelter at night and his mat for collecting coins during the day. It was all he owned.

Blocking Out the Cries of the Needy

One day, Jesus passed through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem—his final journey to show that self-giving love can change the world. One voice rang out above the crowd's noise, "Jesus of Nazareth, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Bartimaeus shouted again and again. The disciples, as usual, were quick to silence him. "Quiet," they said, "We can't hear Jesus' message." Apparently, they were blind to the fact that one of his primary messages was about paying attention to those crying out from the roadsides of life.

It reflects a temptation for all of us to detach Jesus' message about real-world compassion from his other "spiritual teachings." A colleague once told me about a women's group that learned about child slavery in chocolate production. One woman

in attendance became upset, not because of the injustice, but because the church was addressing such issues at all. "I don't come to church to feel bad," she said.

Honey, sometimes it's not about you. If you're really coming to hear Jesus' message, caring about the suffering of others is at the heart of it.

Hearing the Cry

Despite the disciples' attempts to shush Bartimaeus, Jesus said, "Find the person who called out."

That's the command to the church: find those sitting on the roadsides of life, crying out, feeling like God is against them—if there is a God at all. Jesus says, "Bring them to me." Find those whose cries fill our world and bring them safety, healing, and mercy.

A Question for Us

We live in a world full of pain—a world of cruelty and violence. And we are called to be peacemakers, to spread grace and mercy.

Is there a part of you that feels like Bartimaeus? Are you stuck by the roadside, watching life pass by? Maybe it's your circumstances—a relationship, a job, finances, physical limitations, or regrets. Perhaps you came here today because, like Bartimaeus, you tasted the unfairness of life. The wicked prosper while the good you are trying to achieve goes unnoticed. Maybe you feel gutted by the brutal insensitivity of others.

We cry out, "Jesus, have mercy!"

What Will You Leave Behind?

When the disciples brought Bartimaeus to Jesus, he sprang up, leaving his cloak and coins behind. This wasn't a trivial detail. Just before this story, Jesus told the rich man to give up all his possessions and follow him, but the man couldn't do it. Bartimaeus did what the rich man wouldn't—he left everything behind.

What are you willing to leave behind to follow Jesus? It could be some of your money or possessions. Perhaps it's an attitude, a grudge, or time wasted on things that don't matter. The question remains: what are you willing to let go of to follow Jesus?

On Monday, I came across a meme that said, "What matters most isn't who wins the election tomorrow but who you will be tomorrow." No matter what happens,

that is the question: Who will you be? Are you going to sit by the roadside crying, or will you get up and stand up for the way of Jesus: the way of peacemaking, the way of widening the circle, the way of mercy, the way of truth? This is what matters. Who are you going to be today? The world doesn't change by sitting on the sideline.

What Do You Want?

When Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" it echoed a question he asked James and John not long before. They wanted glory—power and recognition. Bartimaeus simply wanted vision.

Vision is more than just physical sight—seeing what truly matters. Bartimaeus, though physically blind, had the insight that the disciples lacked. He saw that following Jesus meant compassion and attention to hurting people.

What do you want? Ask for vision. The kind of vision that sees God in the mundane—in ocean tides, in the abandoned, in acts of kindness. It sees God in moments of peace even when everything around you is falling apart. Vision sees God in ordinary things, and, like the poet William Carlos Williams, we should keep asking, "What have I noticed today that I've missed before?" Keep a journal. Pay attention. There is so much we choose not to see. Let us choose to see. and, like the poet William Carlos Williams, we should keep asking, "What have I noticed today that I've missed before?"

Call to Action: Open Your Eyes

What does God want you to see today? Who does God want you to notice? Vision requires more than just our eyes—it requires our hearts and our souls. Spiritual blindness is worse than physical blindness because spiritual blindness is an act of your will. You can choose to see.

This week, I invite you to take action. Pay attention to the people who are crying out on the roadsides of your life. Choose one practical way to respond—whether through a kind word, an act of generosity, or offering your time. Vision means seeing others with compassion and moving toward them in mercy.

Choosing Who You Will Be

The choice is yours: Who will you be today? Who will you be tomorrow? The world is full of darkness, pain, and injustice, but the world also needs people who rise above the roadside. Are you willing to leave behind the cloak of complacency? Are you willing to be a bringer of mercy and a seeker of vision?

The world doesn't change by watching from the sidelines. It changes when we, like Bartimaeus, stand up and follow Jesus down the road—choosing to see, choosing to act, choosing to be the hands and feet of God in the world.

Lord, give us vision. Amen.