

“MEETING THE MAIN MAN”
Eyes Wide Shut – Blind Bartimaeus
Mark 10:46-52

We have arrived at the end of this short series looking at the stories of people who encountered Jesus while he was walking in person on this earth. And this is the brief, concluding sermon, the one which kind of asks the question which has been lurking unspoken in all the stories we've considered. (It's not directly harvest themed, and I couldn't really contrive to fit it to the harvest theme, but I hope you'll listen anyway.) We've looked at the stories of those who arranged to meet Jesus, of those who were surprised to come across him, of those who had questions, of those who were healed, of those whose lives were changed for ever by their meeting with him, of those who chose to walk away and not let Jesus make any difference to them (only one of them really – the Rich Young Ruler). And we have looked at the ways in which these stories can affect our lives, at the lessons we can draw from them. Underneath it all is a belief that, although he's no longer **physically** with us, Jesus is still around, still listening for us and to us, still able to transform our lives and our circumstances. At least, we say it's our belief.

You see, Jesus is here this morning. He's here, with us by his Holy Spirit. He's here every time we meet together – and we affirm that in our hymns and songs; we say we believe the promise he made in the Bible; we pray in words that suggest he is really with us. But do you *actually* believe that? He is here just as truly as he was there at the gate of Jericho when Bartimaeus called out to him.

There was Bartimaeus, the blind man who could survive only on what he begged from others. No state benefits. No voluntary sector charities. No real hope for the future, really. He'd love to be able to see again – that was the root of the problem for him – but he had to make do with addressing the surface issue of how he was going to get enough to eat until tomorrow. And he was there every day at the gate of the city where all the people passed him. A regular fixture. A local character.

And Jesus came past. There was a bit of a hubbub and he asked a bystander what was going on. “Jesus from Nazareth is passing through,” he was told. An opportunity: a glimmer of hope. He'd heard something about Jesus being able to heal and had nothing to lose by asking Jesus to heal him. He had no dignity left, no status to maintain, no reputation to keep up. He was a blind beggar and there was nothing really worse than that – other than being a blind woman beggar. So he shouted out: “Jesus! Son of David!” (He somehow recognised Jesus as a Messiah figure.) “Hey, Jesus! Have mercy on me. Do something!”

Rather unseemly really. This down and out yelling like that. It wasn't quite the way to treat visiting celebrities. So they told him to shut up. Keep the noise down. Show a bit of decorum. That just made him shout louder and more insistently, and Jesus heard Bartimaeus's hollering and asked someone to bring him over. That showed the prim and proper ones, and they quickly changed their tune. “Hey, Bartimaeus – cheer up! Jesus is actually calling for you.” He leapt to his feet and they led him across to Jesus.

And it was just a simple question, but it cut right to the heart of the problem. “*What do you want me to do for you?*” Jesus knew that this was no appeal for money. He couldn't have responded to that anyway. Bartimaeus wanted his sight back. He wanted the big issue dealt with. And Bartimaeus somehow knew that Jesus could do it. In his desperation, he really believed that Jesus held the solution to his problem. So he blurted out the obvious – “*Teacher, I want to see.*” That was all it took. There's no record of Jesus touching him or spitting on him or putting mud on his eyes. He simply spoke the blindness away. Bartimaeus knew Jesus was there and called out to him.

Jesus is here this morning. We're all here – as we usually are, most of us. Regular fixtures. Local characters. Hoping and praying for solutions to the issues that are bugging us. For some of us it is a need

for physical healing. For others it's broken relationships, or deep anxieties, or problems at work, or something we can't quite put our finger on but it's dragging us down. And we really do want help.

And we bring those issues before God week by week, day by day, hoping for some help in sorting out the surface problems. We've got used to praying for a good visit to the doctor, rather than for complete healing; for a more sympathetic attitude from the boss, rather than for a transformed work situation; for an ability to stay awake while we pray, rather than a renewed relationship with God. We've kind of given up on the really deep-seated issues and we're content just to beg for some kind of stop-gap solution.

And now Jesus is here. It's just dawned on you. This is where you can really meet him, where you can encounter the Messiah. It's not just a line in a song or a verse from the Bible – it's true and it's real. He's here: here with us in this place at this moment in time. And you do want to cry out, to ask him for mercy because it's really getting you down. You need a break – you no longer want just the strength to cope with the problem, but you want the problem to be taken away. "Messiah! Christ! Have mercy on me! Look at what's happening to me and do something about it!"

You'd love to shout that out, but you know there are voices that would seek to silence you. The voice of reason, for a start off. It's not the way to do things. There are doctors, counsellors, lawyers, advisors, bank managers – they're the people who should be able to help. They've helped in the past. Crying out to Jesus isn't really the way to go about solving it. Besides which, it's going to be difficult to explain to everyone at work tomorrow or at school or down the pub.

It might be the voice of religion that's seeking to silence you. That's not what church is about. It's about worship and doing stuff together and doing it all decently and in order, as the Good Book says. After all, can we be sure that these miracles and so on weren't just for the time of the Apostles? And what about if one person gets sorted out and another doesn't? It could all get a bit untidy, couldn't it?

Or is it the voice of embarrassment? If anyone notices you praying – silently but fervently, with the tear trickling down your nose – they're going to wonder what's up, aren't they? They're going to notice you've got a problem and they might not be able to cope. You might not be able to cope. It's so much simpler just keeping quiet and hoping that Jesus will be able to work out what's going on without you having to tell him too much. After all, he knows everything, doesn't he?

And as you wrestle with all that, you realise it's true that Jesus is here this morning. He really is. And if you don't believe that, there's not a great deal of point going to all the bother of getting here, is there? You might just as well have stayed at home and watched *My Favourite Hymns* or whatever. Jesus is here – and as that sinks in, you hear him saying, "*What do you want me to do for you? What do you want me to do for you?*" What **do** you want him to do for you?

Do you want a few coins in the begging bowl? Anyone can give you that. Do you want a sticking plaster over the surface? Your doctor, counsellor, best friend, teacher can give you that. Or do you want the real, deep down, depressing, debilitating problem sorted out? "*What do you want me to do for you?*" What's really on your heart this morning? Don't tinker around with the symptoms: deal with the cause. Bartimaeus didn't mess about with long-winded explanations about how he got blind or what being blind had meant to him all these years or how other people had reacted to his blindness. Jesus was there and wanted to help, so all he said was "*I want to see.*"

What do you want Jesus to do for you? Bartimaeus's situation was totally transformed by Jesus. He would never, ever be the same again. Jesus is here this morning. He'll transform your situation if that's what you want. He can work in your life in ways that you've never even imagined. Jesus is here this morning and he's saying "*What do you want me to do for you?*"

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We have arrived at the end of this short series looking at the stories of people who encountered Jesus while he was walking in person on this earth. And we have looked at the ways in which these stories can affect our lives, at the lessons we can draw from them. Underneath it all is a belief that, although he's no longer **physically** with us, Jesus is still around, still listening for us and to us, still able to transform our lives and our circumstances. Jesus is with us by his Holy Spirit. He's with us every time we meet together – and we affirm that in our hymns and songs; we say we believe the promise he made in the Bible; we pray in words that suggest he is really with us.

This story is about Bartimaeus, the blind man who could survive only on what he begged from others. He'd love to be able to see again – that was the root of the problem for him – but he had to make do with addressing the surface issue of how he was going to get enough to eat until tomorrow. And he was there every day at the gate of the city where all the people passed him. And one day Jesus came past. He'd heard something about Jesus being able to heal and had nothing to lose by asking Jesus to heal him. So he shouted out: "Jesus! Son of David!" (He somehow recognised Jesus as a Messiah figure.) "Hey, Jesus! Have mercy on me. Do something!"

Jesus responds with a simple question which cut right to the heart of the problem. "*What do you want me to do for you?*" Jesus knew that this was no appeal for money. He couldn't have responded to that anyway. Bartimaeus wanted his sight back.

We believe Jesus is still active, but we often pray for help in sorting out the surface problems rather than the actual cause of our difficulties. We've given up on the really deep-seated issues and we're content just to beg for some kind of stop-gap solution.

What do you want Jesus to do for you? Bartimaeus's situation was totally transformed by Jesus. He would never, ever be the same again. Jesus can transform your situation if that's what you want. He can work in your life in ways that you've never even imagined. Jesus says "*What do you want me to do for you?*"

Questions for discussion

1. Doesn't this story imply that we respond to Jesus only for what we can get out of him? Isn't it encouraging a consumerist approach to being a Christian? How can we guard against that yet still take what Jesus offers?
2. Why do we so often address only the surface issues and not the root causes of our problems?
3. Think back over this short series. Which character do you most identify with? (We've looked at John the Baptist, the Gerasene Demoniac, Nicodemus, The Woman caught in adultery, The Rich Young Ruler, Zacchaeus, The Woman at the well, Mary & Martha and Bartimaeus.) Or is there another character from the Gospels you particularly feel drawn towards?
4. What strikes you about the way in which Jesus relates to the characters he meets? Does he always respond in the same way?
5. Most of the Bible is written in the form of story (rather than theology, rules and so on). Why do you think that is? How should we deal with the stories?