

"BE THE SHIFT"

SCRIPTURE: MARK 10: 46-52

GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC

October 24, 2021

The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

Mark 10:46-52

10:46 They came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

10:47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

10:48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

10:49 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."

10:50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

10:51 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."

10:52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

The Word of the LORD
Thanks be to God.

It's a simple, complicated story.

It's a story about pain and freedom.

It's a story about movement and transformation.

Coming and going. Sitting and following. Crowds of people and a solitary man. Hearing and Calling. Seeing and not-seeing. Shouting and silencing. Stillness and springing up.

Let's sit with all the movement for a minute. Can you feel it? Where does all the movement land in you?

Coming and going. Following and staying. People pressing in on you and being alone in a crowd. Hearing and Calling. Seeing and not-seeing. Shouting and silencing. Stillness and Motion. Sitting and springing up.

Let yourself feel the rhythms of the story. The vibrations of crowd noise and shouting and silence. The sensations of stillness and movement. Notice, don't judge. Where is it landing in your body. How? Let it settle in.

How does it sound? How does it feel?

There is dissonance in my next invitation. Feel free to engage what I invite you to do in your own way, in the way that has integrity for you. This story plays with seeing, vision, blindness, and sight.

I am going to share some images depicting Blind Bartimaeus, recognizing the dissonance of a story about someone who could not see being engaged through visual images is important for this next step.

We think we can see sometimes when we can't.

We think we can't see sometimes when we can.

If you are engaging the images visually just notice and receive.

If you cannot see the images or choose not to view them, listen to them.

Amy Kim and Richard will share words (not sentences) that come to them as they engage the images. If you are viewing them, please feel free to share in the chat words or feelings that come to you as you engage.

*(Show Images of Blind Bartimaeus--show each one for 15 seconds)
(Full screen in sanctuary) (Split screen on live-feed)*

Image One:



Image Two:

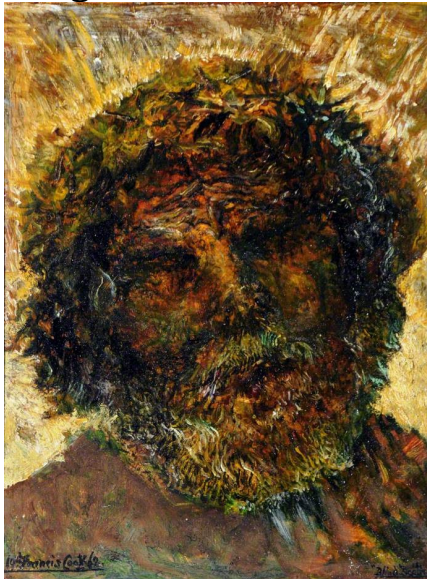


Image Three:



Image Four:



Image Five:

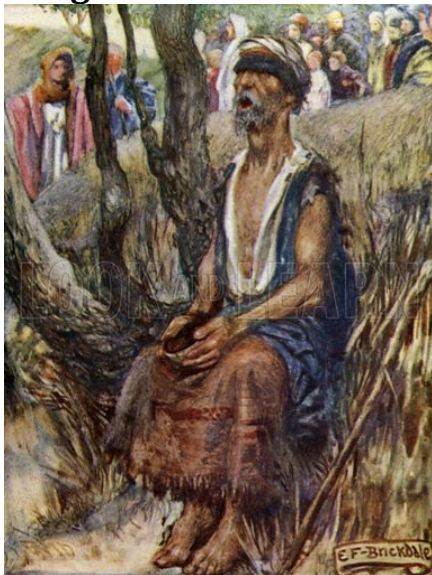


Image Six:

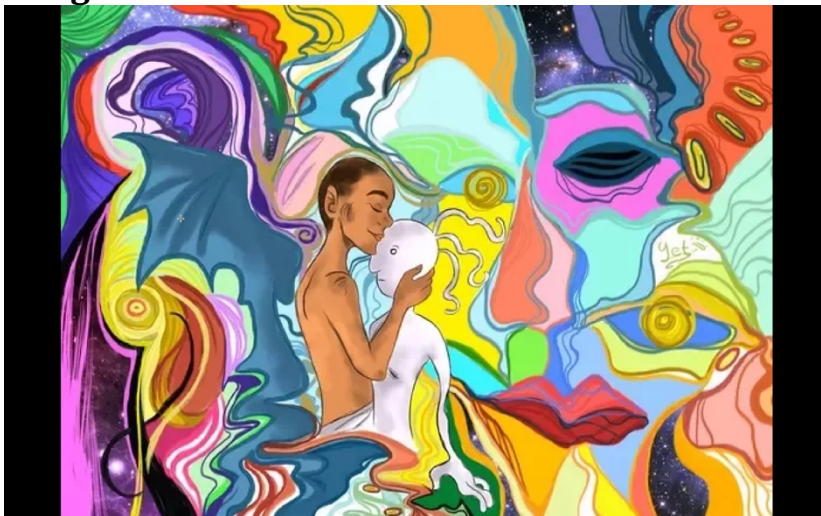


Image Seven:

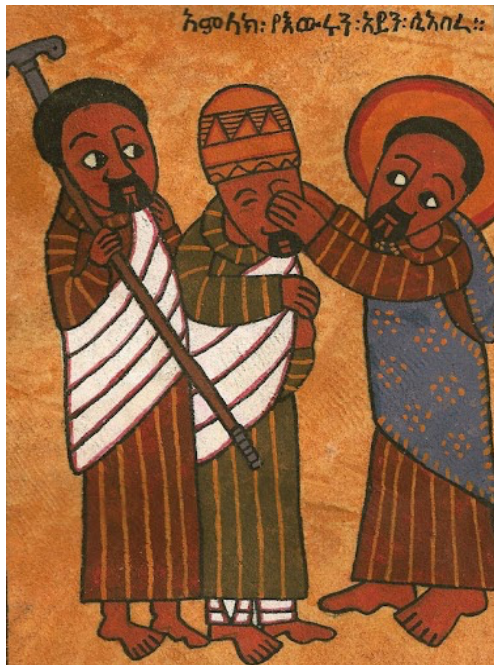
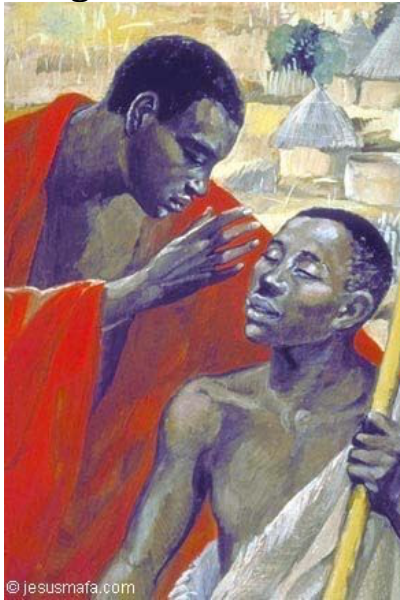


Image Eight:



Image Nine:



Us seeing Bartimaeus is only part of this story. What Bartimaeus can see is a complicated part of this story.

There's pain and promise also in the hearing. Pay attention to the hearing.

- Bartimaeus heard it was Jesus of Nazareth
- Bartimaeus shouted "Jesus, Son of David, Have Mercy on Me!"
- People in the crowd heard his shouts and they told him to shut up--they sternly ordered him to be quiet.
- He cried out even more loudly "Son of David, Have Mercy on Me!"
- Jesus heard Bartimaeus
- Jesus speaks: "Call him here." (could B not hear Jesus)
- Then the crowd calls to Bartimaeus. "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."
- 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."
- Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well."

Can we hear Bartimaeus? Can we hear the crowd? Can we hear Jesus?

What comes up for you when you hear the crowd tell Bartimaeus to shut up--to stop disturbing them?

When have you been told to be quiet? When have you tried to shut someone else down who is trying to be heard?

Sometimes our shouts silence others. Sometimes our shouts empower others. Sometimes the hardest part of someone else shouting is pausing long enough to listen to what the person is saying. Even Jesus had to stop and stand still to really listen.

What comes up for me here is how often white culture tells people to shut up by policing **how** people are supposed to say things. Say it politely. Say it quietly. Say it in your allotted time. Say it when it's your turn. Say it in a way that won't hurt anyone's feelings. Say it in a way that won't offend anyone. Say it in a way that allows us to go about our business without having to really change anything.

We shut people up in lots of ways. And we let people shut us up, too. I'm thinking about how Black Lives Matter has been told to shut up, to be less aggressive. I am thinking about the Black Panthers and how they were told to shut up. I am thinking about how both Black Lives Matter and Black Panthers were labeled as terrorist organizations when they are movements that emerged to protect Black and brown bodies, to stop white violence and terror.

I am thinking about how much women are interrupted and ignored in meetings and classrooms. And I am thinking about the ways our culture shuts people down before they even open their mouths because of how they look or what they are wearing or who they love.

I am thinking about all the ways white culture protects its assets by shutting people up, locking people up.

"Shut up" is such a hostile way to respond to someone else's pain.

Deep inside of us, we all have a sticky residue of belief that a person's pain is their own fault and that our pain is our fault. Why else would we react to pain with such cruelty?

When we ask for mercy we are the shift--we are followers of Jesus on the way, believing that there is mercy when we are hurting and that we matter enough to ask for mercy.

What do you imagine happens when Jesus and Bartimaeus connect?

Many of the images depict Jesus touching Bartimaeus or at least reaching out to touch him. Scripture doesn't tell us that Jesus did any such thing--only that he said "Go, your faith has made you well."

Do you imagine a touch?

Touch may be complicated, triggering--not a welcomed imaginary.

That's an important thing to notice for yourself. Their connection may not have involved any physical contact at all.

Jesus connected in a way that Bartimaeus could receive as a healing connection. We know the connection was made because of its effects, because of the palpable, visible, embodied way that something shifted for Bartimaeus in that moment.

Whatever was restored in his connection with Jesus, it equipped and empowered Bartimaeus to follow Jesus on the way--to embrace a new path, a new way of being in the world, a new way of life.

Jesus transforms the way Bartimaeus is able to interact with the world--and he gives Bartimaeus direction, a way to be the shift.

Be the shift.

It's more than embracing change, it's about the way your body learns to absorb how a shift lands in you.

We've all learned different ways to take care of ourselves when things are changing. Right now we are in a time of intense and immense change. So whatever those ways we've learned are, they have kicked into overdrive.

You may be tensing up. You may be reverting to some old habits. You may be angry. You may be revolting against the change--telling yourself you can find a way to make it stop. You may be feeling weary from it all--exhausted, spent. You may be crying a lot. You may feel detached, numb. You may feel energy. You may feel restless.

Be the shift means being present to yourself and the ways shifts impact you.

Bartimaeus was ready for a change.

And when people are ready for something to change, they are usually pretty determined to do something different.

Pay attention to people in your life who say they refuse to change in a way you need them to change--they are giving you some important information. It's not that they can't change. Or that they won't change. It's that they are not ready to change in the way you are hoping they will change for whatever reason.

And sometimes they are willing to change in some other way just to avoid changing in another. The classic example would be the spouse who struggles with chemical dependency being told by their partner that they have to get help, that life with them has become dangerous or untenable, and that person being willing to get a divorce instead of getting support to address the chemical dependency itself. It's not that they can't change. It's that they are not ready to change in the way someone they love is asking them to change.

Another example closer to home at GCPC would be someone who doesn't like some of the changes that have happened at the church so they change to another church. It's not change itself that they are not ready for, it's the particular change they are being confronted with that they choose to find a way to resist by changing in a way they can absorb on their terms.

It is deep and difficult work to explore what changes and shifts we are and are not ready for and why. Sometimes it's ready or not, here change comes and we are forced to change.

But when we are ready, when we realize what's at stake if we don't change, when we can be intentional about trusting God's hand in the change, then Jesus really has some room to do His thing!

Bartimaeus was ready.

Even when everyone around him just wanted him to be quiet. They wanted him to not upset their image of him as someone they could blame for his own suffering. Someone they could believe had brought it all on himself.

That connection between suffering and punishment ran deep. And physical illness was often seen as evidence of some kind of culpability or sin.

That equation between sin and suffering helps human beings distance ourselves from the suffering of others and our own suffering. Telling ourselves they deserve their suffering means we can find a way to exempt ourselves from suffering. We can find ways to not have to feel the anguish of another being's suffering. It's a double exemption--we can avoid suffering ourselves and we can avoid the pain of seeing someone else suffer. The cost of that approach to suffering is devastating when it comes to building beloved community. We become each others' judges instead of each other's companions on the way.

Jesus disrupted that mentality and habit of becoming each others' judges at every turn. No more shame and blame. Your suffering or illness is not punishment. And you can be free from the burden of self-loathing.

"Your faith has made you well," he says to Bartimaeus.

You see Bartimaeus' first step was believing that it was worth it to shout for Jesus to have mercy--he was ready for something to change. And he believed that his life was worth taking a risk to try something new.

We don't really know what changed for Bartimaeus that day--but we know whatever it was, that he could see Jesus clearly enough to truly follow Him.

That's the question we're left with today, Grace Covenant.

Can we see Jesus clearly enough to truly follow Him?

All of us suffer from some impaired vision when it comes to Jesus--we've been conditioned to see Him in ways that keep us from really seeing him, which in turn keeps us from truly following Him.

The first problem is the ubiquity of the white Jesus--the white European depiction of Jesus had an impact worldwide because of colonization and Empire building. The white Jesus has authorized things like conquest, genocide, and assimilation.

And it can be hard to see Jesus differently, more honestly, more accurately--as the brown-bodied man that He was, when you're not ready to let go of all the

things the white Jesus has given you-after all abusive relationships have staying power--the familiar is a powerful enticement when you are not sure where you fit if Jesus turns out not to be who you think He is.

Can you feel the jolt, the abrupt turn, the quaking, the trembling in that seismic shift?

Jesus isn't white. Jesus isn't American. Jesus isn't a capitalist. Jesus isn't a Democrat or a Republican.

Here's the one that might hurt the most. Jesus isn't a Christian.

Whew! I said it.

I feel myself shaking a bit. It's scary to say it outloud. But I needed to say it.

For us to see Jesus, for us to hear him, and most of all, for us to follow him, then we've got to let go of what's holding us back, what's keeping us stuck in harmful and hurtful ways of living what we thought was a faithful life.

Understanding that Jesus is not a Christian opens up a lot of room for us to finally follow Him. He's not here in our midst to prop up an institution; He's here to support us in a love-induced revolution.

Love is the medicine and the map, the food for our souls and the ground under our feet. Love is what opens our ears and our eyes and our hearts and our bodies to the Holy Shifts that can make all things new.

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It's a story about movement and transformation.

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Be the shift, Grace Covenant. Be the shift.

Thanks be to God.