

Sermon: Agents of Christ
Text: Mark 10:46-52

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The writer of Mark's gospel is a premier story teller, with a fast moving plot, wonderful character development and an amazing message from God.

Up to this point in the Mark's depiction of the life of Jesus, we have learned about several different categories of people.

The powerful, elite religious rulers of the day rejected Jesus' teachings because they understood who he was and that what he was teaching would upset their comfortable lifestyles and the power and prestige they enjoyed.

Jesus' closest followers, 'the twelve', argued amongst themselves as to who should have the seat of honor next to Jesus – while receptive, the twelve were slow to understand what Jesus was all about because they could not consider a world totally different from their experience so they were hoping for elevated status in their earthly terms - they didn't really understand - Jesus told them to serve, not to be served, that the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

A rich young man came to Jesus eager to follow him, wanting to know what he should do to inherit eternal life, only to turn away sad when confronted with Jesus' answer that he should sell all that he had – Jesus was asking this young man to depend on God rather than his possessions.

Today's scripture tells us of one of the minor characters in Marks' gospel, Bartimaeus. This man was a blind beggar – pretty much as low as you could get in the class structure of the day. His days were spent at the city gate waiting for passers by to toss a coin or two his way. This is how he made his living – this was the only way he could survive. He spread his outer garment on the ground to catch money. I imagine in this way a traveler could help without becoming ritually unclean – they didn't have to get close to this beggar – they could toss him something as they walked by at a comfortable distance. Beggars had 'a spot' where they parked everyday, keeping a low profile, close to the ground – after all, they didn't want to offend their benefactors by getting too close – or in today's vernacular, they didn't want to be 'in their face', didn't want to 'invade their personal space'.

Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by and he immediately shouted out acknowledging Jesus as 'Son of David', a common term for the one who would come to save Israel. Immediately he was rebuked – those following Jesus told him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more and Jesus heard him and stopped and told his followers to call him. Encouraged, Bartimaeus throws his cloak aside and eagerly comes to Jesus. When Jesus asks him 'What do you want me to do for you?', Bartimaeus, correctly addresses Jesus as Rabbi or teacher and asks for his sight. By faith, as Jesus claims, he gains his sight and immediately follows Jesus.

This is a wonderful story of healing – Jesus healed many people changing their lives in amazing ways. This is a story of hope and renewal. On a different level, a symbolic level, this is a story of understanding or insight. Jesus asks the blind beggar, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ and he answers, I want to see you clearly, I want to understand your ways, I want to follow you. Of all these characters in Mark’s story, the blind beggar is the one who sees Jesus clearly. He drops everything, leaves his livelihood behind and follows the one who came for all of us. He is willing to risk changing his whole life in order to follow Jesus.

The rich man could not see it, the disciples were a little slow on the uptake but get it eventually. By faith, by the power of God, by God’s Grace, Bartimaues sees clearly who Jesus is and that what he brings to the world is worth changing his whole life for.

So many people are in situations that make us wonder, why don’t they do something about it? A job that you have lost passion for, an abusive relationship, aches and pains that could be alleviated by surgery, therapy, dietary changes. Change is not easy. Sometimes the misery you are in appears more comfortable than the promise of a better but unknown future. In Jesus the future is all joy – not without any bumps in the road – but Jesus gives us the strength, the patience, whatever tools we need to deal with what ever life throws in our paths.

Jesus’ way is not come to church on Sunday and the occasional bible study with business as usual the rest of the week. Jesus’ teaches a whole new way of life – completely counter cultural. Having the most possessions and being a great success is not what it is all about. Having the love of God in our hearts and sharing that love with everyone is what we are to be about. Putting that love central in our lives – looking at life through ‘God colored’ glasses is what we should be about. The love of God as demonstrated to us through Jesus of Nazareth should permeate our whole beings.

Yesterday I attended the CCCME semi-annual conference at the North Deering church in Portland. AS part of the meeting, we read our covenant aloud.

Affirming God’s love

Sustained by God’s power

Guided by God’s Word

*We covenant to be a fellowship of Christ’s people in the world...healers,
reconcilers, agents of peace...the Lord’s free people, gathered in the Lord’s
name, bound in love to one another.*

Healers, reconcilers, agents of peace. Our culture makes it difficult to live this way sometimes. As Christians, as followers of Christ, this is what we are called to do. And it may take some real change in our lives, how we do things, how we live in this world in order to accomplish it. Healers, reconcilers, agents of peace: agents of Christ. This can be as simple as not gossiping, as treating one another with respect, as allowing others a safe space to voice opinions, befriending the ones the world shuns, or it can mean advocating for justice in our world. We are called to not only be agents of Christ within

our church family but also in the workplace with the co-worker who is always taking credit for another's idea, with the bully at school, with everyone we encounter. Jesus challenges us to be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'. Jesus promises us new life - promises that we will be a new creation – a better creation. New creations have a different perspective than the old. If we but have faith, Jesus will make us new.

With faith, Jesus will make us new, again and again. This transformation is not just a one time occurrence. This change, renewal, regeneration even is something that is continuous in our lives. I know of some who have given their lives to Jesus and then feel they fall short but the really good news is that Jesus is always there to bring us new life again and again. It's like being on a diet and having a weak day and then feeling like oh well I blew it – might as well not even try anymore.... But you and I both know that you can and should start again with diet or whatever goal you are trying to achieve. We need to examine our lives and thank God for where we are being effective healers, reconcilers and agents of peace and pray to God for help where we need to work on it. Pray about it asking God to renew us again so that we might transform our every part of our lives to be more like Jesus wants us to be.

We also need to ask ourselves how God wants us to change as a church to follow Jesus. How does God want us, as a church, to be healers, reconcilers, agents of peace: agents of Christ? As a church we need to be in prayer about this. I encourage everyone to come on the second Sunday of the month at 9 am to pray about and for the concerns of the church family and also to pray about how we can be agents for Christ. It may require change – the world today is not the same as it was even ten years ago – people are faced with so many different challenges – how can we as a church be agents for Christ if we don't adapt and allow God to renew us.

Are we ready to follow Jesus in faith?

What will we answer when Jesus asks us, 'What do you want me to do for you?'