

## **Sermon for October 24, 2021**

### **Shivon Miller**

To engage today's gospel story, there are few things about this section of the book of Mark that are helpful for us to know. Today's story of Jesus' healing of a blindman is in Chapter 10, right before Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and begins his journey to the cross in Chapter 11. Back in Chapter 8, Jesus has encountered and healed a different blind man. This healing happens right before Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter responds, "You are the Messiah." We get this kind of "sandwich" in Mark – healing of a blindman, the naming of Jesus as the Messiah and, two chapters later, healing of a blindman before the Messiah journeys to the cross.

Between the healing of the blindman in Chapter 8 and the healing of the blindman in our text today in Chapter 10, Jesus tells the disciples of his upcoming death and resurrection three times. He explains who the Messiah is and what he has come to do. Throughout the whole section the disciples fail to understand and misinterpret the work of Christ as Messiah. They will argue over who is the greatest and fight for the seats at Jesus' right and left sides. While Peter has confessed that Jesus is the Messiah, you could say that the disciples are blind to what this really means. They cannot see who Jesus really is and what Jesus has really come to do. The stories of the blindmen bookend the stories of their inability to "see".

In contrast, the blind man in our gospel today who really has no visual sight, "sees" Jesus for who he is. "When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Son of David" is a title that has been used by some of the Jews to reference the expectant royal Messiah. Not only does he recognize Jesus as the Messiah, he asks for mercy. He understands, he sees Jesus as the coming and work of God's mercy.

The word "Mercy" in the Bible encompasses a wealth of meaning, but at its core "mercy" is undeserved forgiveness, unearned compassion and kindness. There are over 150 biblical references to the word mercy and the majority of them understand mercy as a divine attribute. William Willimon, a well-known preacher states "Mercy is simply the way God is. And Jesus Christ, who becomes the face of God for the Christian community is 'mercy in motion'" – God's undeserved forgiveness and unearned compassion in action.

The blindman sees that Jesus is God's mercy in motion and trusts that God's mercy, God's undeserved forgiveness and unearned compassion and kindness come in Christ and have come for him. While James, John and the other disciples still struggle to earn the top seats at the table, this blindman sees and believes that Jesus has come with the good news of God's mercy for all people. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus approaches the blindman with the same question with which he approached the disciples James and John in last week's scripture reading. Jesus asks "What do you want me to do for you?" You may remember James and John request seats at Jesus' right and left hand in glory.

The disciples become angry with one another and jockey for position and Jesus attempts to explain to them once again the countercultural ways of Christ – whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant – for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Jesus has come as God’s mercy. The disciples cannot “see” it.

But in response to Jesus’ question this blindman says “let me see again.” Isn’t it interesting that the one who really sees who Jesus is asks for sight? Jesus responds “your faith has made you well.” The man’s faith has “seen” what has not been visible to so many eyes. He sees that Jesus is “mercy” for all. The story ends saying immediately the man regains his sight and with his eyes wide open follows Jesus. He follows God’s “mercy in motion” as he journeys to the cross.

Who do you relate to in this story? Do you feel like one of the disciples confessing Jesus as Messiah but unable to grasp what that really means? Are you still trying to measure up? Do you struggle to see God’s greatness as mercy for all? Or do you feel like the blindman crying out “Lord have mercy!” Do you see your need for undeserved forgiveness and unearned compassion? Do you know Jesus as the one who freely gives? Do you long to have your eyes wide open to follow God’s mercy in motion into the world?

This man cries out to Jesus “Have mercy!” even as the world around him sternly orders him to be quiet. The more the voices around him try to silence his cries for mercy, the louder he becomes. He knows his desperate need for mercy. He sees the desperate need for Jesus, God’s mercy in motion in the world. Do we know this desperate need for Jesus, for lived mercy? Or does the world around us keep us from speaking this truth? Are we willing to get louder, that all may hear cries for mercy and respond as God’s mercy in motion? Deaconess Betsy Karkan states “truly free mercy is what distinguishes the Christian Church from every other religion, every cause, and every type of humanitarian aid effort - The mercy of Christ given freely to all.”

Mercy – undeserved forgiveness, unearned compassion, a divine attribute, the way God is.

Professor David Buttrick says “We live full time in the mercy of God. The air we breathe, the grace we trust, the life we live – it is all mercy. We owe our lives to the mercy of God.” Pastor Matthew Harrison says “Wherever the church breathes in the blessed gospel and sacraments, it cannot but exhale mercy and love toward the neighbor.” We inhale the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. We exhale the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

I invite you into the practice of a breath prayer this week. Find a quiet moment to sit and simply breathe. On your breath in, inhale the Words “Receive Mercy.” Breathe in the gift of underserved forgiveness and unearned compassion given to you in Christ Jesus. On your breath out, exhale the words “Be Mercy.” For this is what distinguishes the Christian church; this is how we follow - Living the giving of Christ’s mercy for all.

Jesus asked the blindman “What do you want me to do for you?” He replied “Let me see again.” In Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, may we see again who Jesus really is and what Jesus has come to do, and may we follow this “mercy in motion” with eyes wide open to be this “mercy in motion” out on the road.