

**"What do we see?"  
(Mark 10:46-52)  
October 24, 2021**

How many blind men were there? One, of course. His name was Bartimaeus, which means the son of Timaeus. He was sitting at the roadside. And the encounter between him and Jesus happened when Jesus was leaving Jericho, heading towards Jerusalem. Well, that's what the Gospel of Mark told us. However, if we flip to the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 20), we shall see that there were two blind men instead of one. Other than that, it was almost the same story, except that the two blind men were not encouraged by the crowd that initially rebuked them to approach Jesus, and the faith that made their healing possible was not even mentioned. The Gospel of Luke (Luke 18) mentioned there was only one blind man like Mark, but it complicated the situation even more, as it reported the event happened when Jesus was entering instead of leaving Jericho.

Apparently, there were a lot of beggars, disabled, sick, mentally and psychologically challenged individuals, and lepers, who were forced to live outside the city. Would someone care for their well-being? Perhaps only their healthy close relatives. These individuals with various problems, including the blind man Bartimaeus were not welcome by the city. Was there a big difference among them if they were Jews or non-Jews? I don't think it really mattered to them. They were treated in general badly by everyone, and their only unachievable hope was to get better. Imagine if you were one of them, how would you feel when you hear that there is a person who can make a paralytic walk again, heal leprosy, defeat the evil spirit, bring the dead alive, make a deaf hears, and a dumb speaks? You probably also want to meet him, desperately.

Bartimaeus called Jesus “Son of David.” I wonder how much he knew what it meant. Primarily a wonderworker from his own people, I believe. He required someone who could deliver him from blindness that prevented him from seeing things around him, from having a second chance. One might say the loss of eyesight is not the end of the world. Stephen Hawking was in a worse condition, but he had a successful life. However, we are talking about Bartimaeus who lived two thousand years ago, a miserable life. There was no technology to help him. We are living two thousand years from his, do you think ours is better? Obviously! Our clothing is made of better materials. The food we consume is cleaner and healthier. Our place of living can stand cold in winter, heat in summer, even windstorm and snowstorm won’t destroy it easily. Transportation is even better. We have bicycle, scouter, automobile, public transit in the city, train, cruise ship and airplane for long distance travel. So many options, sometimes we even feel too many!

Once I asked my friend to describe to me what most young people nowadays want. My friend said, food and shelter are not as important since they could abide with someone and share everything. They like stuffs with brand names, and prefer a better vehicle, though. The most important of all, however, are their cell phones and phone plans. The connection with others comes first, the rest is negotiable.

Do you think Bartimaeus would disagree with that? I don’t think so. The most important need of most young people my friend described is not different from what Bartimaeus wanted. Since Bartimaeus was blind, his need could be named more specific, i.e., “vision.” But what about our young people? What about us? Does “vision” mean anything to them? To us?

Bartimaeus could not see when he met Jesus. When Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “My teacher, let me see again.” He wanted to regain his eyesight. It was probably not just eyesight that he wanted to regain, but also the benefits that came along with it, like safety, self-esteem, friendship, and opportunity. Once he regained his eyesight. He chose to follow Jesus, a great teacher, to be with a group of people that he could trust, communicate, and face challenges.

We are not the same as Bartimaeus, however. We are not blind. We feel safe most of the time, have high self-esteem, a lot of friends for communication, and lifestyles that we choose. Maybe those are the reasons why we are not eager to say the same as Bartimaeus, “My teacher, let me see again.”

Do we feel safe? We all should respect everyone’s privacy. But when everyone or every organization raises its shield high up, transparency would become impossible and that nurtures a culture of suspicion. Being suspicious might not necessarily be a bad thing, but when it becomes something that cannot be proved wrong, cannot be rectified through fact-checking, then it becomes problematic. Why don’t my neighbors say hi to me? What are the politicians in Ontario thinking about when to exit Step 3? We seldom hear people talking about the hole in the ozone layer and acid rain anymore? Do they become better? How does the carbon tax work? Does the lockdown for almost one and half year help the environment a little bit despite other damages that have been done? We have reasons being suspicious and feeling unsafe. Should we say like Bartimaeus, “My teacher, let me see again”?

More and more young people nowadays got one or more degrees in universities. They should be proud of themselves for the efforts they put into

their studies. It depends on the subject matters they are in, they might be leading the development of some most advanced technologies, making the most important decisions for international corporations, distributing billions of dollars into different areas for investment. How many percent of the population do you think we are talking about here? 5%? Maybe less than 1%. So, what is the basis for our high self-esteem? Should we say like Bartimaeus, "My teacher, let me see again," so that we can figure out how to deal with our pride, and our lives?

We have a lot of friends around us, more than what Bartimaeus had. Do we feel lonely? It's lucky if we see ourselves as lonely before it's too late. The relatives, acquaintances, and pets that we see now will not be there for us forever. Our personal spiritual journey would be very lonely if God is not there for us. Should we say like Bartimaeus, "My teacher, let me see again," so that we treasure our presence to others, as we appreciate the transient presence of others to us? What level of communication should we pursue so that we can say the time is being well spent?

We do have a choice of our lifestyles, don't we? Yes, and no. We are all bound by resources that are available to us, which include our energy level, health condition, and ambition. Imagine that we are a matchstick. The purpose of life would be burning, to give out light and heat. An even better result, of course, would result by making other matchsticks burn, so that there will be more light and heat. Do we see it as our goal? Maybe Bartimaeus' words, "My teacher, let me see again" can still be useful.

Jesus wanted to hear what Bartimaeus wanted to say. What do we want to say, if Jesus stood still and call us to come to him? Are we being shy because we know how little faith we have? Remember, Jesus was not looking for great faith,

but any faith like matchsticks that can still be ignited. Jesus wanted us to live as we are made for. He is willing to restore our vision again, so that we can move forward with confidence. What do we see? I think what bothers us more is the question, "What do we want to see?" Figure out our real need now and say it out loud. Then Jesus would reply to us as he replied to Bartimaeus, "Go; your faith has made you well." Our questions do not always receive answers that we want, but they do lead us to deeper meaning. The quest will continue, and we shall not feel lonely as God is present with us. Just be ready for more adventures. Amen.