Many of you know my father was also a pastor. Before the days of computers, he kept each of his sermons in a separate envelope and wrote on the outside when and where he preached that particular sermon. He had a sermon on the passage I am about to read that he preached 75 times! *(Hopefully not to the same congregation!)* It’s the story of *Bartimaeus*, the blind beggar.

*46* They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. *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!” *48* Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

*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.” *50* So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. *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.” *52* Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

*The message is in the movement of this story. It begins with blind Bartimaeus sitting by the roadside begging. Poor, blind, disenfranchised, sitting in the ditch beside the road. How does life get there? And why is he in that ditch and not everybody else? What does that ditch have to do with us? It’s difficult for people like us to even acknowledge we have such needs. What needs we do have, we can usually meet, unless a catastrophe comes to visit. Then we cry to God, but otherwise we do quite well. We don’t sit in ditches begging. In fact, we often own the ditch!*
There’s a beautiful hymn, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*, we will sing in just a few moments. The refrain is;

*Great is Thy Faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!*

*Morning by morning new mercies I see;*

*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;*

*Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!*

One day I was singing that in worship and for whatever reason, I just changed the words! I sang,

*Morning by morning new mercies I see;*

*All I have needed MY hand hath provided;* Yeah, it just came out!

Freudian? You think! *All I have needed MY hand hath provided*…That wasn’t a slip, it was a confession!

Jesus said it is difficult for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Why is that? Do the riches insulate us from our needs? Where is *my* blindness? Where is *my* poverty? Where do *I* need the healing touch of Christ?

*Bartimaeus* couldn’t hide his condition. He’s blind! Everybody knows it. It’s when we *don’t* think we need anything that we are perhaps the most blind. To live with the illusion of self-sufficiency, is a different kind of poverty. It’s a ditch on the other side of the road! But it’s still a ditch!

*So Bartimaeus* shouts out, *'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'* (10:47)

Right out there in front of everybody. It’s disruptive. It’s definitely not Presbyterian! It’s way too personal, even intimate.

I like this line from my dad’s sermon,

*There is not a greater moment in a person’s life than when they seek and cry out to God.*

*(William E. Eason, “Bartimaeus’ Encounter With Jesus.”)*

That may be true, but do we always have to go to the ditch before we *“seek and cry out to God?”* At the point of a person’s greatest need, at their darkest hour, they may be on the threshold of a new life! That’s great, but why do we wait for our darkest hour to seek God?

*The answer may be in this. It says,*

*Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly,*

*’Son of David, have mercy on me!’* (10:48)
They “sternly ordered him to be quiet.” What makes us want to silence people who are in need? Is it just too uncomfortable, too messy, too close? I don’t know. We shy away from being vulnerable, yet it is when we are vulnerable that we are the closest to one another. Isn’t that true?

Bartimaeus may have been blind, even poor, but he wasn’t a doormat. If he had listened to the crowd that day, this story would have never made it into the Bible! Sometimes you have to cry out from the ditch. Sometimes you have to get even louder.

* 

And then it says;

*Jesus stood still*[](10:49a)

He stops for one person who is socially insignificant. In that day, if you were blind, or had a disease of any kind, you must have done something wrong and you were being punished by God. Surely the Messiah would not stop for such a person. And yet, he did.

There is an art to stopping. Some of the most significant things in life happen because we stopped, or someone stopped for us. Jesus stood still. His agenda changed. Something not planned was about to happen! He tells them, ‘Call him here.’ *(10:49b)*

* 

Now this is where Bartimaeus does something very unusual.

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

A beggar’s cloak is all he has. It would protect him from the weather. It was his bed at night, his cover from the sun during the day. But in this instance, it was a hindrance. It’s no small detail that a beggar throws off his cloak. They noticed it and wrote it down!

We all live with our cloaks, the things that hinder us from coming to Christ, from surrendering our lives to the will of God. It’s whatever keeps you in the ditch.

*Pride…can’t let go of that cloak.*

Doubt
Skepticism
Intellectualism
Shame
The love of wealth
Anger…sometimes even at God.
They’re all cloaks! Bartimaeus threw off his cloak!

* 

Oddly enough, Jesus asked him;

‘What do you want me to do for you?’ (10:51a)

Why would you ask a bling beggar what he wants? He’s blind! Maybe Jesus just needed him to say it. Maybe Bartimaeus would have asked for the wrong thing. He could have said, “I want you to make me the most powerful man in all the land.” Wrong answer. It’s actually a profound question that each person needs to answer for themselves. “What do you want (Christ) to do for you?”

Bartimaeus says,

‘My teacher, let me see again.’ (10:51b)

And Jesus said to him,

‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ (10:52a)

Then it says,

Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.
(10:52b)

* 

It begins with blindness and ends with sight. It starts with a man sitting on the side of the road with life passing him by, and it ends with him following Jesus on the way.

And did I mention that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, to be crucified? He was on his way to the cross and resurrection. It would happen in just a few days. If Bartimaeus followed him from Jericho, then Bartimaeus was likely in Jerusalem for the crucifixion and the resurrection! Imagine that! From the ditch of despair to the highest point of hope!

We know that not everyone is healed from blindness or poverty, but everyone is invited to get up from their ditch, throw off their cloaks, and respond to God’s grace. Whatever happens next will be the real miracle of it.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Congregation: Amen.