

22PentecostB2021

Imagine Bartimeus. Blind. Not born blind, but blind. Sitting there on the roadside when it happens. Jesus comes near. And he hears. He hears that Jesus is near. And what does he do? He calls out. Calls out to Jesus. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The people around him urge him to stop, embarrassed. But Jesus said, "No. Bring him here." Then they urged. Jesus asked the penultimate question. "What do you want me to do for you?" And he gave his penultimate answer. "Let me see again." It happened. He followed.

He used to see. We do not know what caused his blindness. But there he sat. Supposedly bereft. In his cloak. On the roadside. When he heard. He heard that this Jesus was near. Blindness and all, he called out. Just shouted out to the air, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He got up, shed his cloak, received his sight, and then followed.

Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" If he allows himself to want his sight, two possibilities open up. His hopes could be dashed if Jesus can't or won't do it. Or, he could actually receive his sight. But what then? After all, he now has an identity that revolves around being a blind beggar. Who will he be if he is no longer blind? Who will he be if he is no longer a beggar – without all that attention and pity? How will he live as a person who can see?

Doesn't each of us have to wonder when an opportunity for new life comes along? What will happen to the old self? Will it just shrivel up and die? Should it? Can I live without what it provided? And this promised new self? If I reach out, can I attain it? Can I be it? What if I can see?

How often do we say no? How often do we just prefer to stay the same? It's easier. It's comfortable. It's known. I'd rather just sit blind, in my cloak, on the side of the road. To want to be healed, changed, to become more whole, takes courage. Deep courage. "I want to see."

When I was very young after having graduated Augustana, I ran into then-chaplain Richard Swanson, or Swannie, at a Homecoming parade. There, on the sidewalk of 7th Avenue, across the street from Old Main, he looked into the air and said to me, "I have no regrets. To have regrets would be to wish that I am different than who I am."

Bartimeus wished differently. He opened his heart. He opened his heart to possibility. He opened himself to the unknown. He just called out at the right instant. He wanted to see.

And Jesus asked the question. The question. "What do you want me to do for you?"

What if Jesus asked that of you? What if Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" What would you ask? What would happen if the answer was yes? We are so tempered by reality, by the science. What if he could make you see, too? Or any other thing you desire? What if?

As fate or destiny would have it, we should be careful what we ask for. Bartimeus was given the chance to see again. Great! And after he received what he wanted, all he desired was to follow Jesus – to give what remained of his life to the one who gave him life.

But in the next moment, Jesus was going to Jerusalem. That became Bartimeus' fate....or destiny.