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Narrative Lectionary 2.26 – Lent 2
Mark 10:32-52

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Salem, Bridgeport

“H Is for Healing – and Seven Steps to Get There”

Close your eyes. Seriously. Close your eyes.

You're blind – you can't see a thing.

Your robe is scratchy, and your exposed skin is covered with dust from sitting at the side of the road.

You feel the hot sun beating down on you

with only the occasional breeze to blow away the sweat on your brow.

The smells of the city fill your nostrils – the pleasant scents of roasted goat and spices and perfumes
mixing with the harsh odors of dung and the sweat of men and beasts.

There are the normal sounds of city life –

a buzz of background conversation, 2 men nearby in animated conversation, a woman humming softly,
the clanging of a pot, the sound of 3 children running past, and laughing.

And then there's a new sound – the sound of a huge crowd coming down the road!

“What's going on?” you call out to the men nearby.

“What do you mean?” one of the men responds.

“The crowd...” you say.

“What crowd?” the man asks, puzzled, as he pauses to listen.

A minute or so passes and he says, “Oh! I hear it now! I don't know....”

And then in a louder voice he shouts, “Hey, Jesse! Go see what's up!”

A young boy's voice answers, “Okay, Father”, and he's off and running.

It's not long before he's back, out of breath, but shouting out the news between gasps,

“It's that miracle worker! That man uncle John was talking about last night!

You know, the healer rabbi from Nazareth!”

Your heart leaps with hope!

Yes! You have heard of this man! You heard that he had cured people – blind people!

Oh, God in heaven, let it be true! Let it be him! And let this be the day you are healed!

You can hear the first people in the crowd approaching,

so you begin shouting, “Son of David, have pity on me!”

“Shut up, you old fool!” growls a loud voice nearby.

“Don't you have any manners?” another reproaches.

And a softer voice advises, “Don't get your hopes up, my friend.

You don't want to be disappointed if he doesn't stop.”

Doesn't stop??? No!!! He's got to stop!

You know you are making a fool of yourself and risking incurring the wrath of the crowd –
maybe even the rabbi himself – but this could be your only chance.

“Son of David, have pity on me!” you shout again. And again! And again!

The more those around you try to silence you, the louder you shout out.

And then, against the background of all the other voices, you hear a powerful yet gentle voice.

You listen as hard as you can, but you can't distinguish the words.

And then the woman next to you, taps you on the shoulder and says,

“Go! He's calling you!”

Other people are talking, but you're no longer listening.

Throwing off your cloak, you jump to your feet as if you were a youth again
and rush blindly in the direction of that voice, hands out ahead of you,

just praying that the sea of people will part to let you through.

Suddenly your arm is grasped and that same voice says, “I've got ya, Friend. What can I do for you?”

“I want to see”, you reply. And miracle of miracles, you can see!

I think it's pretty safe to say that we all believe in the Bible. We all believe that Jesus healed people. And we all believe that God heals today – through doctors and medicine and surgery and other procedures. We believe. And yet we struggle with unbelief.

We want to be healed, but we suffer illness.

We want to be whole, but we remain broken.

We want to step into a new way of living, but we seem trapped in the old.

Our story today of blind Bartimaeus illustrates 7 steps towards healing that I'd like to share them with you.

#1. Ask.

Dare to ask for what you want, for exactly what you want, for specifically what you want.

Let's say I make a vague request and ask God to make me feel better.

Well, chances are that there will be times I feel better, and times I feel worse,

and so it will be difficult to say if my prayer was answered.

I can look at the times I felt better and figure my prayers were answered,

or I can look at the times I felt worse and figure that they weren't, but it all becomes very subjective.

If I ask God for something specific, however – to cure me from migraines, instance,

then I will know whether or not that prayer has been answered.

Bartimaeus didn't ask for health or wholeness; he asked to see.

So #1. Ask – for exactly what you want.

#2. Believe.

No sooner did Bartimaeus ask then he heard the voices shouting him down.

“Be quiet!” “Are you crazy?” “That's impossible!” “Why should God listen to you?” “You don't deserve it!”

To a large extent we receive what we believe in life.

My mother believed that if you went outside without a hat on you'd get a sore throat.

And sure enough every time she went out without a hat, she got a sore throat.

I, on the other hand, determined that she was nuts

and simply refused to wear a hat and refused to develop a sore throat.

Or, another example...

If I believe that just because my great grandmother and grandmother and mother suffered from osteoporosis that I will, then I will.

But if I believe that lifting weights & taking calcium & vitamin D & bio-identical hormone replacements will prevent me from getting osteoporosis, then they will.

Whatever it is we believe, we will receive.

So whenever words of disbelief or doubt or discouragement come from without or from within,

we must ignore them, drowning them out with a reiteration of what it is we ask.

So #1. Ask; and #2. Believe; and...

#3. Commit.

When Jesus called blind Bartimaeus to come to him,

he threw off his cloak, jumped up and made his way to Jesus.

If you're blind you've got to keep your stuff with you or you might not be able to find it again.

The fact that Bartimaeus threw off his cloak meant that he was confident he'd be able to see to find it again.

When you're blind you move hesitantly and carefully

because you can't see where you're going and you don't want to stumble and fall.

The fact that Bartimaeus jumped up and made his way to Jesus meant that he wanted to see so much that he was willing to risk falling & getting hurt & making a fool of himself to get what he wanted.

It's not enough just to ask for something new, you've got to leave the old behind.

If you want to be healed, you can't keep doing all the things that are preventing you from being healed, you have to begin eating and exercising and living as a healthy person.

If I pray that I will lose weight and I keep gorging myself on desserts, I can't expect my prayer to be answered!

#1. Ask; #2. Believe; #3. Commit; and...

#4. Declare.

When Jesus asked Bartimaeus what he wanted he said out loud in front of the entire crowd, "I want to see!" It's one thing to pray for what you want in secret; it's another to make your request public.

Making it public proclaims your faith.

Making it public brings everyone else's expectation into the process.

Making the request public means that when the answer is made public, not only will you be rejoiced but so will everyone else.

Sharing the answer to your prayer gives glory to God and strengthens the faith of everyone who hears.

#1. Ask; #2. Believe; #3. Commit; #4. Declare; and...

#5. Expect to experience.

Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well".

We don't always like to hear those words.

Perhaps it's because we hear them as making faith into a kind of work.

Perhaps it's because we don't like the responsibility for our healing being placed upon us.

Perhaps it's because they turn any illness we experience into a kind of judgment.

But there's no getting around it. Jesus said those words. And he said them many times.

Yes, when it is time to die, our prayer for healing will not be answered,

but until that time, God desires health and healing and wholeness for every single person.

When we are praying for healing we must ask, believe, commit, declare, and EXPECT that we will be healed.

If we don't expect it, we won't get it.

So if we want it, we must expect it.

And if we don't get it right away,

we have to keep on expecting it, and keep on expecting it, and keep on expecting it, and never stop.

It's like if you want to win the lottery, you've got to buy a ticket.

And if you don't win with that ticket and you still want to win the lottery you've got to buy another ticket.

As soon as you stop buying tickets you lose your chance at winning the lottery.

As soon as you believe that your prayers won't be answered, they won't.

#1. Ask; #2. Believe; #3. Commit; #4. Declare; #5. Expect 'til you experience; and...

#6. Follow in faith.

When blind Bartimaeus was healed, he followed Jesus.

When we are healed, we need to follow Jesus, too.

Throughout our lives we will need healing for one thing or another.

To receive healing once and not return again and again would be crazy.

Bartimaeus once sat on the side of the road, waiting for Jesus.

But now that he was healed, he never had to let Jesus out of his sight again.

#1. Ask; #2. Believe; #3. Commit; #4. Declare; #5. Expect 'til you experience; #6. Follow; and...

#7. Glorify God.

Have you ever given someone a gift and they haven't been grateful? It's a lousy feeling isn't it.

So when God blesses us, we need to give thanks and praise,

not only because God deserves it, but because we want everyone to know from whom our healing came.

In a few moments we will have prayers for healing.

As we prepare for this great gift, let me encourage each and every one of you to...what...?

Ask! Believe! Commit! Declare! Expect! Follow! And Glorify!

Amen?

Amen!