

This is one of the Gospel stories which can be quite easy to imagine - the crowds - Bartimaeus shouting out as others try to silence him - and then jumping up when Jesus calls to him - and finally, the moment when his sight returns.

It is easy to guess the range of emotions around the healing - amazement - joy - bewilderment - irritation, perhaps, when Bartimaeus insisted on drawing attention to himself.

By creating as detailed an image of it as we can, we can also gain deeper insights on the story. We can begin to see things in it of which we may not be aware simply by reading it. And this extra dimension - of seeing more deeply - is part of the message of the story.

The question Jesus puts to Bartimaeus – *‘What do you want me to do for you?’* – repeats the question that Jesus put to James and John in last Sunday’s Gospel.

The replies stand in stark contrast. In last week’s Gospel, the response of the two apostles is to ask for power and glory. In today’s Gospel, the blind beggar answers the same question by asking to see again. What follows is equally contrasting.

The twelve apostles descend into argument while Bartimaeus chooses to follow Jesus on the arduous ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem – a difficult journey that reflects the demands of discipleship.

Jesus is surrounded by blindness – the bewildered confusion of the twelve; the cruel reaction of the crowd, who *“scolded Bartimaeus and told him to keep quiet”*; the blindness of those in Jerusalem determined to destroy him. Through this sight-giving miracle, Jesus makes Bartimaeus a living sign of what he is doing in the name of his Father – healing the world’s blindness, healing communal blindness, healing individual blindness and leading the human family to see in him the truth of God’s ways.

The *“faith”* Jesus frequently speaks of as he works a miracle is a blessed openness that recognises in his coming that the Father’s generous plan is beginning to be realised. In contrast to those around Jesus, Bartimaeus has this openness. He is the first person in the Gospel accounts to address Jesus publicly with the messianic title, *“Son of David”* – a title Jesus avoided because of the political overtones it had assumed in his time.

Bartimaeus throws off his cloak and hurries forward to ask for the miracle that had been promised as a sign of the Messiah. His readiness is instantly rewarded, and he joins the company of Jesus' disciples.

Bartimaeus may have been blind but he "*saw*" in Jesus someone who could heal him. He "*saw*" the possibility and grasped his opportunity. Even though those around him did not see as he did and tried to quieten him, Bartimaeus trusted his "*vision*" and continued to call out to the one he "*saw*" and who he knew could restore his sight.

The question this poses is "*what did he see?*" What did this blind man see in Jesus that so many of those around him did not? And what is the implication of that for us?

It begs further questioning. What are we blind to? Who are we blind to? What is our blindness that needs to be cured?

People are blind to the cry of the earth. Blind to the cost of pollution, environmental vandalism and the global threat of climate change.

People are blind to the cry of the poor. Blind to the hungry of the earth, the homeless, the asylum seeker and those fleeing violence and war – often wars of our own making.

People are blind to neighbour and stranger, the needs of the other. Blind to the need for conversion and change. Blind to the need for repentance and renewal.

It can be very hard for us to see Christ in the midst of the sights and sounds of our world. We can be easily blinded by prejudice, intolerance and arrogance. Easily blinded by our own wilfulness and uninformed conscience. Easily blinded by misguided loyalty to peer groups and friends, political parties, social media, conspiracy theories and even the machinations of the institutional Church.

Can we muster the courage to say with Bartimaeus, "*Jesus, I want to see!*"

May the Lord open our eyes to recognise him in the Breaking of the Bread, in the footprints of our own lives and present in the poor, the outcast, the sick, the stranger, the victims of violence and hatred, the groaning pain of our planet.

Then with Bartimaeus, may we joyfully follow Jesus, with clear sight, along the road to Jerusalem.