



## First Step Is A Doozie– Touchpoint for October 23, 2024

### Mark 10:46-52 (NRSVUE) Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

#### TOUCH POINT

<sup>46</sup> Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

<sup>48</sup> Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

<sup>49</sup> Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” <sup>50</sup> Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

<sup>51</sup> “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

<sup>52</sup> “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

### **Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

In a spiritual direction session, I often ask one who seeks discernment, “What do you want?” There is usually a very long silence, the head tilts back, and the person says, “I don’t know.” There is often surprise and, often, sadness. It can take many days of reflection to allow our deepest desires to arise. Sometimes, the question entertained can finally permit a desperate desire to awaken within us.

Desperate desire isn’t a hair-on-fire moment. It is rather a deep awareness of what’s been lacking at the heart level. Often, sadness arises because the question has not been asked by others or even myself. We may have been living others’ lives and wants or have just been living as human doers instead of beings.

The what do you want question can offer a step toward healing and transformation. Desperate desire can lead us to take a step in the direction of uncertainty. The good path of uncertainty may not feel right because it doesn’t always feel good. The future is unknown. Perhaps this is the blindness we must overcome to move in faith.

Faith is not doubtless trust. It is a step in the face of great doubt.

In Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones, like so often, is running from something that wants him dead. Running through the mountain hollows, he skirts to a quick stop. He finds himself between a rock and a hard landing place a few hundred feet down. Standing trapped on a cliff with no visible way to survive., he looks hundreds of feet down and then across the chasm to the rocky mountain wall on the other side. Feeling

hopeless, he remembers the words of his deceased father. Take the step of faith. He wondered if this was the moment his father prepared him. If not, he may plunge to his death.

"Nothing is holding you back except the load you choose to carry.

Anxiously, he takes a step into nothing but air. As the camera pans, we, the audience, see Jones standing on a bridge that appears to be out of thin air. But it didn't. When he took that step of faith, his perspective shifted, and he found himself standing on a bridge that had been camouflaged by the mountain wall before him.

Remember the story of the rich young ruler? He hesitated and ultimately held on to the only life he knew. He couldn't leave his status behind to grasp Zoe, the eternal vitality of life. He had asked Jesus what it would take to live a forever-free life. Jesus's response was, in essence, "Nothing is holding you back except the load you choose to carry. Leave it and come follow me."

We are free to keep the life we're living, but what do you really want? When we say we want to be free, is it something we deeply want?

Richard Rohr quotes English poet, W.H. Auden, answering why we can't take the step of faith. He says, "We would rather be ruined than changed. We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the present and let our illusions die." (Rohr, Richard. *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps* (p. 6).

Wow! That can apply to so many of my life's challenges and help me move toward a more fulfilling life.

Where is our desperate desire? Holding on to fear's questions—the what-ifs, what's next, what if I'm wrong, what if I go alone, or even more deadly, what if what I'm letting go of is my identity—can be paralyzing.

Remember when Jesus asked the man who couldn't walk, "Do you want to walk?" I always thought that was a mean question. But the man answered, "YES!" I do! Maybe discovering our deepest desire is the beginning of walking "on the way" to transformation.

Perhaps if we surrender to what we deeply want, we will forsake things we "think" we want.

A desperate desire originates from the deepest parts of the heart. A superficial desire wants to hold on to things like Steve Martin's character Naven in *The Jerk*. He lost everything, and as he leaves his foreclosed house, he yells, "I don't need anything!" Then grabs an ashtray and says, "But I need this." Pretty soon, he's carrying a chair, a paddle ball, an ashtray, and a remote control. His arms are full as he walks away in his pajamas. It's sad and very funny. But it's not funny for those of us who have sat on the fences of indecision, not knowing what we really want.

Perhaps if we surrender to what we deeply want, we will forsake things we "think" we want.

An alcoholic in recovery remembers when they were first asked if they wanted sobriety. There are some who said yes with their words, but their mind was still negotiating the cost. Others actually chose sobriety simply to hang on to things they were afraid of losing. Things they had already lost. It doesn't matter why; this is the blind part. We don't necessarily move forward with perfect motives, and we will doubt an awful lot, but like this beggar, faith walking is taking a step into the blindness of our inaccurate perceptions.

Scripture says, “No eye has seen, no ear has ever heard, no mind can comprehend what God has in store for those who welcome God.”

This is why I believe the world needs the voice of alcoholics and addicts who can share with a willing listener what humility is. What surrender is. What suffering is. What the path to healing and transformation is. Yes, there are real hard heads in the AA program bullying others into sobriety. That’s not recovery. That’s just another addiction.

But who in this life would ever agree to tell others all the wrongs they’ve committed? Who would admit they are powerless and their life has become unmanageable? Why do we need this hungry, transformed group of wild geese? Because they fell backward into the waters of spirituality. They did not earn it by going to the right church, believing the right way, or having the money to hide it within their gated mansions of prosperity and go to a private luxurious treatment facility they called a “vacation.”

Sober addicts/alcoholics no longer believe in a God made in the image of themselves. However, many religious “believers’ do see God as a version of themselves. They are addicted to their version of God and to themselves. This is not sober living, and transformation is needed. Their life is not imminently threatened like Indiana Jones on a cliff or a substance user one overdose away. There is no sudden desperation for a person addicted to themselves. It is a slow, unfolding chain of private indiscretions that eventually make life unmanageable...for others.

He’s like a lost child in Macy’s, screaming, “MOM!”

For the addict/alcoholic, the path to sobriety was not typically a chosen path, but they are grateful for its serendipitous call, like Jesus to the beggar: “Call him here.” Gratitude is the hallmark. They could care less about what kind of coffee beans are being used at meetings. They are grateful for having a full pot.

As far as the man who shouted shamelessly to Jesus, “Have mercy on me,” in front of hundreds on a pilgrimage to celebrate Passover? He knows Jesus is near, but he’s blind and can’t see. But Jesus sees him. He cares not how many can hear him yelling to Jesus. He’s like a lost child in Macy’s, screaming, “MOM!” Lost in the rack of dresses, he can’t see his mom. But his mom hears his shouts.

Now, that's a desperate desire.

I love this beggar guy; he is so awkward! He’s a beggar, and he’s blind, and he ignores people telling him to shut up. He’s calling Jesus Son of David, which is not theologically accurate for this occasion, and he doesn’t care. When he gets close to Jesus, he stops calling him Son of David, a political figure, and says Master Teacher. His new perspective changes from messianic Jesus to a guru. He is becoming less blind already. When he is told Jesus is calling him, they tell him to have courage. What fools! He was already leaping excitedly and without hesitation! He had nothing to lose.

I imagine that, as a beggar and a blind man, he had no image to protect. I don’t think the beggar shouting compelled Jesus as much as the others telling him to shut up. Perhaps Jesus despised people telling a person to shut up. I think Jesus dislikes this part of humanity’s inclination to shush, minimize, and push away others who are seeking with desperate desire.

The man doesn't stop there. He adds two more traits of genuine transformation on his path of faith healing. Gratitude and devotion.

If you're lucky enough to share gratitude lists with others and adopt a practice of your own, you know that gratitude can ground you in the present and help connect us devotedly to life.

The story concludes with the man calling Jesus, "My teacher." How beautiful that is! His perspective on Jesus changed from Son of David to Master Teacher to My teacher. Then the story concludes, "He followed Jesus *on the way*. That last line is pregnant with wisdom and meaning for another day.

May we follow On The Way as beggars, getting our sight back with every step of blinded faith.

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following You will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that, if I do this, You will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust You always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for You are ever with me, and You will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen." - *Thomas Merton*

**Amen**

## **Opening Song**

### **Be Still**

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

### **Create in Me**

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

## **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **In the Arms of God**

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

*Refrain:* Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the

heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care.

Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace.

*Refrain*

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God.

*Refrain*

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God.

*Refrain*

### **The Meal**

#### **The Lord's Prayer**

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

### **Benediction**

#### **A Celtic Blessing**

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you,  
the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.  
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.