

## ATTACHMENT F

### **Bishop Ohl's Convention Sermon October 29, 2006 Abilene, Texas**

“And 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.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.” (Mark 10:51-52)

Does the question of Jesus sound familiar? It ought to, as it is word for word that same question we heard last week put to James and John. In that part of the story the brothers, also known as “sons of thunder” probably because they were always arguing, ask Jesus to do for them whatever they ask. Sounds like a five year old wanting mommy or daddy to give them something. He replies by asking what they really want. With self-assured egotism, they request to be in the greatest places of honor when Jesus comes into his kingdom. Also the reply of a spoiled child.

Today it is the blind man Bartimaeus who has the audacity to call out to Jesus over the protestations of the crowd of followers and hangers-on. When Jesus calls the man and asks what he desires, the reply is not egocentric but at the core of life. “Let me see again.” What a difference between those closest to our Lord and this beggar. One would expect the disciples to be the ones who know Jesus as “Son of David” but it is this stranger. One would expect the disciples to be asking to serve Jesus not be served by him. One might even expect the blind beggar to ask for alms; but he asks for his sight.

This beggar's name is full of irony. Bar in Hebrew means “son of,” and Timaeus in Greek means “one to be honored.” Thus, Bartimaeus means “son of honor”, and yet he is a poor beggar. He conveniently sits near the gate of the city of Jericho on the road for pilgrims and tourists traveling to Jerusalem. His work is to offer to city folks and travelers alike the opportunity to give of their bounty and feel good about themselves for giving alms, perhaps even to brag about their largess. He is just trying to survive, and his name belies his situation.

Does this man whose name is incarnate irony understand what he is asking? We know nothing of how long he has been blind, relying on the pity of others, but we can surmise that he has made his life fit into his situation of poverty. Is he prepared to change what likely has become a comfortable, if abject poverty? Is he ready to be ridiculed for having been blind? Will he be able to free himself from his dependency on blindness? Is he now prepared to earn an honest living? Has he become inured to the scorn of the populace of Jericho? And when he is able to see, how will he treat those who treated him so shabbily? What will happen when all of his reference points are radically altered by his encounter with Christ?

These and other questions do not even occur to him as he sits begging. All he knows is that the one whose fame has preceded him is now present and on his way to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus wants desperately to meet this Jesus, so he cries out to him, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” The crowd, which includes both the disciples of Jesus who have been following him for some time and locals who simply want to be part of the entourage, try to silence this poor wretch. But he cries out all the louder. He is shameless in his plea to Jesus for mercy. And then the master calls Bartimaeus to himself.

Now the one who has made such a nuisance of himself with his pleading is brought before Jesus and asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” The beggar who screamed out loudly and pitifully is now confronted with the possibility of healing and wholeness.

“What do you want me to do for you?” How would you answer that question if you were to meet Jesus face to face this morning? Will we, as James and John did in last week’s Gospel lesson seek our own aggrandizement, putting ourselves above others? Or will we, like blind Bartimaeus perhaps for the first time in our lives realize the depth of our own blindness? How are we blind? you might ask. Let me guess a few ways out of my own experience. How do we refuse to see the need in our own communities, the poverty, the incipient racism that pervades our society, the lack of educational opportunities for certain segments of our schools, the need for adequate housing, the hunger for just a taste of the Good News that we take for granted, the loneliness of the elderly who have no families, the exhaustion of those caring for the desperately ill with terminal disease or dementia, the deep hunger for someone simply to acknowledge that they are alive? Need I go on?

You see, when we are blind we do not have to see all of the ugliness that surrounds us. It is this kind of self-imposed blindness that keeps us and our communities from becoming the persons and communities God has called us to become. Fortunately for us, Jesus asks this question of us again and again. Someday when we tire of responding with an answer that approximates that of James and John we might answer with Bartimaeus, “Lord let me see again.”

The story of blind Bartimaeus does not end, however, with his recovered sight. This narrative is not simply a healing miracle; it is also a call story. Hearing the man’s pleas, Jesus calls him. The call is not just to present himself before Jesus; it is a call to follow. Here is a man whose faith is so strong, whose determination to meet the Lord is so powerful that he will not let anyone or anything hinder him. Jesus commends his faith and without so much as a mud paste on eyes or a laying on of hands declares, “Go, your faith has made you well.” Immediately, immediately—that word we hear so often in Mark’s Gospel—immediately he regained his sight and then something remarkable, something truly miraculous happens. Bartimaeus follows Jesus! Unlike the man whose blindness was healed at the beginning of the journey to Jerusalem who stayed away from everyone as Jesus commanded, this man follows Jesus. He picks up his meager belongings and follows Jesus. His life is turned upside down, and he follows Jesus.

There is a prayer from the 12<sup>th</sup> century which says prays “Day by day, Lord of Thee three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly, to follow thee more nearly, day by day.” Bartimaeus is our model for this way of life.

### **THE CHARGE**

I want to ask the Deacon candidates to stand please for the charge.

Deacon’s ministry is not simply being the “diaconal person” for a congregation, Your task is to be a servant leader—which is one who shows the community what servanthood is all about. You are not to be the “do-er,” you are to call all of us to take our place as servants, kneeling before one another to wash feet. You are to stand with one foot in the world, seeing the needs, with the other foot in the church seeing the resources, and then bringing the needs and resources together.

I know that in the life of each one of you there has been miraculous healing. You have met the risen Lord Jesus on your journey in faith and he has touched you each in ways that can only be told in awe and mystery—perhaps parable. Some of your blindness has been removed, and you not only see but you can identify the hunger in your towns and communities for Jesus’ healing touch. I charge you to be as shameless as Bartimaeus in crying out for the healing of your parishes, your towns, your communities. I challenge you to continue when the crowd around you tries to silence you with their own shouts or with implicit threats of castigation. Remember those calling for your silence may themselves be followers of Jesus. I dare you to continue calling to Jesus yourselves to remove whatever blindness to the needs of the world you still have—and believe me we all have our own blind spots. I call you to lead the charge of the ministry of servanthood both within your congregations and among those with whom you live and work and play. Never become complacent with the way life is today; always seek the deeper healing touch of the Lord Jesus not for yourselves but for the world in which you are a servant. Let your voice be that same clarion call that the beggar, blind Bartimaeus gave to his world. Seek the miracle of sight for all, and do not be surprised to find Jesus calling out, “What do you want me to do for you?” Prepare your answer today and be ready to recite it daily. “Lord, let me see again.”