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<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 saved you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. Mark 10:46-52 (NIV)

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Reg was dying. He knew his time was drawing near. As that time approached, he turned to his wife and gasped out, "You know, Bertha, you have always been with me. Do you remember the time I was unexpectedly fired from my job? You were there; you never left my side. Do you recall the time that I was cleaning the gutters and I fell off the roof? Once again, you were there to call others for help; and you were there during that long painful recovery. Then there were those times during the depression when we had nothing. Way back then, you were there. And now I dying. Can I say I, Bertha, I am not surprised you are here? I have to say, Bertha, you are bad luck."

What do you think it means to be a follower of Jesus? Do you have a picture in your mind of ‘everything going well’, and ‘everyone being happy’, and there always being ‘goodwill among people and peace on earth’? Do you have a picture in your mind of all your prayers being answered like getting the winning lottery numbers for the biggest lottery prize ever seen (that is, all your trials and troubles being washed away? Do you have a picture in your mind of being a part of a group of people where all is well, and you always find your ‘best friend’ among believers? Do you have a picture in your mind of a life of ease and comfort because ‘God will bless you’?

When it comes to the account of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52), if we take this story as it stands alone, it seems to tell us that being a follower of Jesus means that all will turn out well. Jesus is travelling with a large crowd. It seems there is ‘success’ in the proclamation of God’s word, as large groups of people are following Jesus. People are miraculously healed. And when ‘good things happen’, people thank Jesus and are eager to follow Him.

Is this your experience in being a follower of Jesus: everything turning out well, there always being people around you to support you, and people being eager to gather together to give praise to God? Or have you sometime felt like the blind man sitting by the roadside, crying out for someone to help in your time of

need? Have you ever felt a sense of isolation, even in a community? Have you ever felt that other people are judging you, even in a 'community of faith', such as Bartimaeus may have felt when people were telling him to be quiet?

"There is none so blind as those that will not see." This is a saying that was used by Jonathan Swift in 1738 (Swift was a writer famous for works like *Gulliver's Travels*). One of Swift's works is a satirical essay called "*A Modest Proposal*" which has the full title "*A Modest Proposal for preventing the children of poor people from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public,*" "*A Modest Proposal*" is considered one of the greatest examples of sustained irony. Within the satire Swift "proposes" that poor Irish families sell their children, for extra income, to the rich to be eaten. Swift wrote this satire as an attack on the indifference that the landlords of his day had toward the dire needs of their poor tenants.

"There is none so blind as those that will not see." There are biblical origins to this saying. In Matthew 13:13 we hear Jesus say, "This is why I speak to them in parables: 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand'." In Jeremiah 5:21 the LORD God says to His people, "Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear." "There is none so blind as those that will not see." So often we are like this... And this is not speaking of physical blindness, but dullness of heart and mind...

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? When it comes to the account of Bartimaeus receiving his sight, we often like to picture ourselves like Bartimaeus, crying out to Jesus as the Son of God, and being healed of all our diseases. And so often we forget that there was a large crowd who was following Jesus, including His disciples. They had seen Jesus heal the sick, raise the dead, and boldly confront the leaders of His day. He had eaten with 'sinners' and tax-collectors, and prostitutes, and all sorts of other people considered as 'outcasts'. And what did the followers do when they heard someone cry out to Jesus in his time of need? The Bible says that the followers of Jesus rebuked him.

What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? Does it mean that 'things always go well'? Does it mean that we will always be 'free from trouble'? Does it mean that we 'always get it right'?

Only a few days before Jesus' death on the cross – and note, this is only a few days before Jesus' death on the cross – Jesus encountered a blind man who sat by the road. This is a fascinating encounter. First, because Bartimaeus's name is mentioned. Did you know that of all the people who were healed by Jesus only a few are actually named? Various Bible scholars point out that the only person (apart from those with whom Jesus had a long term friendship, ie Lazarus) who Jesus heals in the New Testament whose name we know is Bartimaeus. Why? Many believe that Bartimaeus went on to become a leader in the early church.

But there is a hint of irony in Bartimaeus's name. John Mark describes Bartimaeus as the 'son of Timaeus', and this name could mean 'son of the honoured one'. But it could also mean 'son of the despised' (depending if one follows either a combination of Hebrew and Greek in the name, or if one is actually consistent with the Hebrew of the name). There is a contrast here. Bartimaeus calls out, 'Son of David, have mercy on me', and he is 'son of honour'. But there is hardly anything honourable about Bartimaeus's situation. Begging was not the way people wanted to survive, and often physical blindness was seen by some as some sort of 'punishment' on sin (for example, consider how Job's friends responded to him in his darkest times)...

Then there is the dialogue between Jesus and Bartimaeus. In last week's Gospel (Mark 10:35-45) there is a conversation of James and John with Jesus. James and John wanted some honour by sitting at Jesus' side when He came in His glory (Mark 10:37). There is a contrast to the conversation. When blind Bartimaeus came to Jesus, Jesus again asks, "What do you want Me to do for you?" But Bartimaeus' request is more immediate. Bartimaeus simply says, "I want to see."

What does it mean to be a 'follower of Jesus'? Is it about 'success' and 'wholeness' and 'prosperity', and of 'smiley happy people' as is often popularised by many today? (Just look at the images often used to portray Christians).

Bartimaeus received 'sight'. Immediately he regained his sight, and he followed Jesus on 'the way'. There is an old fable tells of a blind sheep who was approached with the offer of being healed. That sounded good, but before the procedure, he asked what he'd been missing during the time of his blindness. When told of cruelty and war, selfishness and greed and hate, he declined to be healed. He said it would be a punishment to watch the terrible deeds of the world and its people. Soon after receiving his sight, one of the things that Bartimaeus may have had to endure was to watch the crucifixion. Bartimaeus followed Jesus on 'the way'.

When it comes to the account of Jesus healing Bartimaeus, Luke's Gospel account tells us that when Bartimaeus followed Jesus, he kept on praising God, and the crowd followed his example (Luke 18:43). Perhaps after this healing, as Bartimaeus continued to shout praises to the Son of David, the crowd picked up on that, and they started to call Jesus by that title. By the time they got to Jerusalem, the crowd was shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matt.21:9). Maybe that shout of praise by the crowd at the Triumphal Entry was started by one blind beggar who experienced the power of Jesus in his life.

The healing of Bartimaeus is the last healing miracle in Mark's gospel. It is significant that this healing miracle has to do with the restoration of sight. In last week's reading we saw disciples squabbling over who would be greatest. They had a kind of blindness about what makes for true greatness. Immediately upon the healing of Bartimaeus Jesus enters Jerusalem where He would suffer and

die. As Jesus entered Jerusalem the crowds call Jesus the Son of David, but the events of the following week sees the crowd call out for Jesus' death.

"There is none so blind as those that will not see." Often, as 'followers of Jesus', we like to speak about 'the good we do'. But we can so often be 'blind' to the 'sin' in our lives. Sometimes for people this is a wilful choice.

The gift of God, though, is His mercy in Jesus. Bartimaeus threw away his cloak – and his old life with it – when Jesus summoned him. Perhaps this is also a representation for sin and those things that encumber us and prevent us from following Jesus. Jesus said He is the light of the world. When we truly look at the cross of Jesus we 'see' the mysterious and incredible nature of God's love. Here is a love for a sin-filled and broken world. Here is a love for sinners and those who were held captive to death. Here is a love that is for you and for me.

There are none so blind as those that will not see. Bartimaeus – even before his healing – had received a 'spiritual sight'. His 'spiritual insight' was, simply, that he needed Jesus. Jesus' encounter with Bartimaeus teaches us that when chains are broken, lives are healed, eyes are opened, Christ is revealed.

Bartimaeus received the gift of sight. Bartimaeus' physical healing was amazing. But the healing God seeks to give is much more than physical healing. Bartimaeus was separated from society (in effect, 'hidden in plain sight'). But now he followed. The 'healing of soul' through the forgiveness of sin allows people to 'reconnect' in ways far beyond any human effort. And Jesus said to Bartimaeus, "Your faith has saved you."

"Amazing grace-how sweet the sound...I once was blind, but now I see." How awesome that we can sing that in the confidence of one called to be a follower of Jesus. By God's amazing grace we follow Jesus in faith. And we know that we do not always follow Jesus in His every move, sinners as we are. But mercifully He forgives us and keeps us in His way. As we recognise the things that blind us from the Lord (and paralyse us from effective action), let us never cease begging the Lord to heal us! "Lord, that I may see!" And when our vision is restored, let us get up to follow Him joyfully along the way to the Kingdom. Amen.