

Notes

Please note that this document contains 3 different versions of the "Exploring the Word" worksheet. Each version contains the same Gospel texts, Reflection and questions, but with a different configuration of "alternative views". The suggested activities are applicable to a variety of age ranges. Some activities may not be suitable in all circumstances.

Activities

- Use a map of 1st Century Palestine to chart Jesus' journey through the section of Mark's gospel 8:22 – 10:52 – a journey from Bethsaida to Jericho. How does the physical journey towards Jerusalem also reflect a spiritual journey towards the death and resurrection that awaits in Jerusalem?
- Compile a list of phrases and expressions in everyday use that relate to blindness. Why does this sensory loss bear so heavily on our language and attitudes?

Gospel Journal

Which phrase or statement in the passage bears particular significance for you?

Would the impact and message of the story be different if Bartimaeus had some other affliction?

Why does this account come at the conclusion of a section about discipleship?

When have you ever experienced a sense of 'sitting at the side of the road'?

How would you answer Jesus' question, 'What do you want me to do for you?'



Reflection

This passage from the Gospel of Mark draws to a close a significant section of the gospel. It stretches from 8:22 to this passage, 10:52. Like other examples in the Gospel of Mark, the stories at the beginning and end of the section are related and shed light on what they surround. Like this passage, the event at the beginning of the section is an account of the healing of a blind man. Contained within the two healings of blindness, as we have seen over the last six weeks, is an extended lesson on discipleship. Within this section, Jesus speaks about his upcoming death on three occasions and each time the disciples display their own form of blindness when they fail to understand what Jesus is trying to tell them quite explicitly. In this section, we have heard that discipleship involves suffering and hardship; it means placing one's own needs last and the needs of others first; and that discipleship is all about faith.

In this healing of blind Bartimaeus, we see all the hallmarks of what Jesus has been trying to teach the disciples in the preceding episodes. As a blind man, Bartimaeus would be regarded as 'imperfect' – incomplete – and consequently in a permanent state of uncleanness. He would not be allowed to live within the bounds of normal society, nor have contact with people. So it is that Jesus encounters Bartimaeus on the side of the road, outside the city walls as he is leaving Jericho. Learning that it is Jesus passing by, Bartimaeus calls on Jesus to help him and the crowd tries to shut him up and remind him of his status. But Jesus calls Bartimaeus to him and, placing the needs of the other first, asks 'What do you want me to do for you?' When Bartimaeus makes his request, Jesus announces that it is his faith that has saved him and his sight is restored. Bartimaeus, like a good disciple, then follows Jesus on the road.

Gospel Mk 10:46-52

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and to say, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man. 'Courage,' they said 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Rabbuni,' the blind man said to him 'Master, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you.' And immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

Have you Thought?

On the side of the road...

When Jesus encounters Bartimaeus he is sitting by the side of the road – a reject of society sitting off to the side as the world passes him by. There are times in all of our lives when we feel like this: hurt; ashamed; unloved; rejected; cast aside. It is at these moments in our lives that Jesus really wants to 'break through' into our experience. If we allow ourselves to hear his voice calling us to him, then we too can 'throw off our cloak' – our old life – and join him on the road.

Living the Gospel

Bartimaeus, a model?

Bartimaeus is a man who has almost nothing in life. His blindness has made him outcast and he is reduced to begging on the side of the road. When he is called to Jesus he jumps up and casts off what may well be his only real possession – his cloak. Yet what he does have in abundance is faith and hope. When asked what he wants Jesus to do, his answer may seem obvious, but his desire to see goes beyond physical sight. He asks for the sight of one who truly believes and to whom the truth of Jesus is revealed. In this way, he is a model to all who would be disciples.

- Q. Which phrase or statement in the passage bears particular significance for you?
- Q. Would the impact and message of the story be different if Bartimaeus had some other affliction?
- Q. Why does this account come at the conclusion of a section about discipleship?
- Q. When have you ever experienced a sense of 'sitting at the side of the road'?
- Q. How would you answer Jesus' question, 'What do you want me to do for you?'



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Scriptural Context

Blindness

Blindness is a powerful metaphor that is used repeatedly throughout scripture. It is almost always a metaphor for blindness of heart or blindness of mind rather than a purely physical affliction. There are multiple accounts of healing blindness in the gospel. Saul/Paul is blinded on the road to Damascus and only has his sight restored when he is baptised. The Pharisees are described as being 'blind fools' and there the prophets make numerous references to blind seeing as a sign of the Messiah's arrival. It is a very powerful image of being 'blind' to truth and 'blind' to the teaching of Jesus.

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