

*“Attending to the Word”*

*“Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ And the blind man said, ‘Rabbi, let me recover my sight.’ And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.”*

**Introduction**

While working for a volunteer ambulance company, a couple of EMT’s were responding to a call with lights and sirens, when they came upon an elderly man in his car in front of them.

Much to their annoyance, nothing they did could make him get out of the way, that is, until one of the EMT’s got on the PA and said, ***"Pull over to the side of the road."*** The man quickly pulled over to let them by.

Several hours later, when returning to the station, they saw the same guy still pulled over on the side of the road. Thinking something was wrong, they jumped out and went to his aid.

He met them with a smile. Whereupon, being questioned as to why he was still sitting there, he explained, *"Well, God told me to pull over, but he hasn't told me what I should do next."*

**Main Point:** Attending to the Word of the Lord – His most lasting and true means of grace – we are saved, given our sight, and set firmly on the path to follow our Savior.

LIKE A BEGGAR, GOD’S WORD ATTENDS TO US, SO THAT WE  
MIGHT ATTEND TO GOD’S WORD.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Preached as part of “1<sup>st</sup> Century Spiritual Practices” on Lent 5 - 3/17/24

**“WE ARE BEGGARS, THAT’S FOR SURE.”** (Martin Luther)

<sup>46</sup>**And as [Jesus] was leaving** (“drawing near to”<sup>2</sup>) **Jericho** (with His eyes resolutely set to Jerusalem) *with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus* (as well as another unnamed man<sup>3</sup>), **was sitting by the roadside** (begging). <sup>47</sup>**And when he** (after inquiring and being informed by the crowd who it was that was passing by<sup>4</sup>) **heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”** <sup>48</sup>**And many rebuked** (kept on rebuking) **him, telling him to be silent. But** (because the call of faith will not be deterred) **he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

How is it that a blind beggar is able to see what everyone else cannot? “Have you, though deprived of sight, read the Scriptures?” queried the early church Father Cyril. “How have you discerned the Light of the world?” (*Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, 1:408)

Where, throughout Jesus’ ministry, He is often confronted by those whom you would expect to see Him, but – because of their spiritual blindness – choose not to. Physical sight does not translate into spiritual sight. In fact, it may well hinder us from beholding the kingdom of God.

A perfect example of this occurs when – just before our reading this morning – two of Jesus’ inner circle, James and John (and their mother), approach Jesus with this request:

*“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”*

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 18:35; for various angles on the apparent discrepancy with Luke on this point, see Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, 531-534; italicized parenthetical material from Luke 18:31-43

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 20:30

<sup>4</sup> Luke 18:36-37

The one petition arises from presumption and power, while Bartimaeus' desire to see is from faith; "the one request would sidestep suffering, the other is forged out of loss, exclusion, and helplessness. The one is bent on an exclusive claim to righteousness, the other is bowed down in need before the Son who alone is righteous." (Jarvis, *Feasting on the Word (B)*, 4:212)

Let us so bow down. Where, in Jesus' economy of grace:

*"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."* (Mark 2:17)

Where, out of our poverty, our beggary, and our need ...

### **GOD'S GRACIOUS WORD ATTENDS TO US.**

***<sup>49</sup>And Jesus stopped and said, "(decisively, once for all) Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you."<sup>50</sup>And throwing off his cloak (most likely his most treasured possession), he sprang up and came to Jesus.***

O the joy of being tended to when God attends to us with His life-saving and life-giving Word!

Where, most in this world simply pass by the crowds of people – "the lonely crowd" – like the wounded in the ditch. But not Jesus, whose Word is "*a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.*" (Psalm 119:105) Whose Word exposes our poverty of spirit, but then offers the saving and settling salve we need – applied – "*while we were yet sinners.*" (Romans 5:8)

***<sup>51</sup>Jesus said to him (as He would to each of us), "What do you want me to do for you?"***

Yes, what do you want Jesus to do for *you*? Imagine it. Where do you need His Word applied right now? He stands ready to answer. By grace and the Holy Spirit, let Him attend to you.

Is it the burden or regret of some past sin? He has forgiven it.

Is it a deep sorrow over some loss? Jesus has borne it to the cross and beyond.

Is it some hurt that's been done to you, beckoning you to forgive? Jesus has felt it worse, and has spoken His Words from the Cross, to right the wrongs – to bring healing, to bring peace.

Is it – like Bartimaeus – that you feel lost in the crowd – a “lamp-shade”? Is it simply to be refreshed for your journey? Call out to Him. You will not be denied.

*“[His] word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart ... (where) if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:8-9)*

Yes, be Bartimaeus!

*And the blind man said to him, “**Rabbi** (ραββουνι - **my** Lord, **my** master<sup>5</sup>), **let me recover my sight.**”*

Bring to Jesus your sin ... your sorrow ... your hurt ... your need to be rekindled by a holy fire! He is, even now, at your door!

Pray your deepest spiritual need, Jesus says – “*in My name*” and “*according to My will.*” It will be done for you!

<sup>52</sup>**And Jesus** (“in pity touched their eyes”<sup>6</sup>) **said to him** (attending us with His life-giving Word), “(Recover your sight.) **Go your way; your faith has made you well** (“your faith has saved you”).”

Where, once sought out, and saved ... once attended to:

**WE joyfully and diligently ATTEND TO THE WORD of the Lord.**

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<sup>5</sup> “While ‘rabbi’ is the usual Hebrew term for respected religious teachers, the intensified form in our text was usually reserved for God himself in Jewish literature.” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:962)

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 20:34

***And immediately he recovered his sight and (glorifying God)  
followed him on the way.***

Where, we rejoice to join Bartimaeus today as we attend to Jesus and His Word ... as we seek to:

✚ Learn of Him ... “read, learn, mark, inwardly digest” Him.

There is no substitute for this. Devotional books are great. Pastor’s sermons are grand (☺)! But they dare not take the place of spending regular time with Your Savior in His Word.

*“Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed ... how ... you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus ... that the man (and woman) of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:14-15, 17)*

✚ Pray Him and His Word ... recalling that prayer is entering into a holy conversation with your heavenly Father.

“The Word of God is the well of living water, and prayer the bucket with which to draw it out.” (Author unknown)

Finally, attend the Word of the Lord by ...

✚ Do[ing] the Word.

*“Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.” (Luke 6:47-48)*

As you enter your days, in all of the places where you live, move and have your being, take His Word with you. Yes, how might this morning’s Word be realized in your thoughts, words and actions throughout this day?

Do it ... by considering *whom* you might attend – meeting them as Jesus meets you – in *their* need.

For, when our life as disciples is marked by encounters with others who want to see, others who want to walk, others who want to be cleansed, we catch a glimpse of what it is to come close to Jesus ourselves.

*“Whoever keeps [My] word, in [them] truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him.” (1 John 2:5)*

“Following so close, may you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi.” (Author unknown)

### **Conclusion**

Serving at the time as provincial governor of Northern Italy in 374, St. Ambrose was called in this capacity to the cathedral in Milan, where a riot between two rival factions of Christians was threatening the peace. Each were intent on winning its own candidate’s nomination to become the new bishop.

Ambrose quelled the riot, but was unable to persuade the warring parties to agree on a bishop. When, finally, someone suggested Ambrose himself to be their Pastor, a nomination that was enthusiastically greeted on all sides.

As the story goes, Ambrose protested in vain. “I am not even baptized,” he said. An easy remedy. Where, all within short order, he was baptized, then ordained, and finally consecrated bishop — all within the span of a single week! ([www.thepastorsworkshop.com/sermon-illustrations-calling](http://www.thepastorsworkshop.com/sermon-illustrations-calling))

What a great story of redemption and purpose – just like Bartimaeus’ ... just like our own! Where, not seeing we see ... beggars now become disciples ... “living, seeing, walking, and singing proof that Jesus is Servant and Savior.” (McKenna, *Mark*, 222)

That’s what the call of Christ and His grace still does – when out of our beggary, Jesus attends to us with His Word, bringing us to attend to His Word in faith and love. Go and do likewise. *Amen.*

[Friday E-mail:] It's often been noted that when one is deprived of one or more of their senses, that the other senses become all the more heightened and intensified. For example, for one who is blind, they have an uncanny ability to "see" what others miss, because their sense of hearing or touch is all the more magnified.

Such is the case with a man named Bartimaeus in our Gospel reading for this Sunday. You can read the account in Mark 10:36-52. Where, when one throws in that "sixth sense" – the spiritual insight and alertness which comes by way of the Holy Spirit's presence – a blind man sees, while others who have all of their senses intact do not. Bartimaeus, though blind, sees Jesus!

It's not unlike what transpired in the life of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. Greatly stirred by the needs of the poor of London, and that most churches were doing nothing to reach the "undesirables," Booth's ministry of "soup, soap and salvation" brought thousands to Christ.

Where, in his 80s, Booth's work began to be hindered by blindness – ultimately losing vision completely. His son Bramwell brought his father the bad news ... that he would never see again. To which Booth replied, "God must know best, Bramwell. I have done what I could for God and the people *with* my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God and the people *without* them."

Without them, and then *with* them, Bartimaeus did just that. As the Lord attended to Bartimaeus with His life-giving Word, Bartimaeus attended to the Word by following Him. Leaving what little he had, "Bartimaeus – son of Timaeus" would forever be known to Mark's readers, and to the church as a man of faith.

It is to such a faith that Bartimaeus invites you and me. No worries: physical sight is not required. But to see Jesus as our companion for the way is – to attend to His Word, embarking on an adventure of a lifetime. Who's up for the journey? His Word will be "*a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.*" Under one condition, though: those who think they are well, need not apply!