



Some actions have long-lasting impacts. We would not be here today, living our faith within the Episcopal tradition, if it were not for Johann Tetzel. In 1516 and 1517, Tetzel was raising money so St. Peter's in Rome could be rebuilt. To raise money, Tetzel and others sold indulgences. Buying an indulgence was a way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for sin.

This practice infuriated Martin Luther so much so that in 1517 he is claimed to have nailed his *95 Theses* to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. This protest led to what we call the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation played a big role in the English Reformation and the creation of the Church of England and thereafter The Episcopal Church. Some actions have long-lasting impacts. And, the practice of selling indulgences was eliminated. God's grace and mercy cannot be bought.

Today is also called Reformation Sunday. It is a Sunday when remember that re-forming is periodically necessary if we are to grow and be strong in our faith. We prune trees and bushes from time-to-time so that they may grow straight and strong. One reason, I hope, that you come to church is to be re-formed or at least to consider where and how the Word of God is calling you today. That may or may not be the same place as last week let alone ten years ago. When we are open to the Holy Spirit, we are open to learning and deepening our knowledge of God and where God is calling us to be in the world spreading the news of the Gospel through how we live and what we do. The Collect this morning prays for an increase in us of the gifts of faith, hope and charity. Not only for ourselves, although that is also to be desired, but so that we may love what God has created.

The story of Blind Bartimaeus reminds us that there are two ways of seeing: one sees only the things of this world and one sees beyond this world to eternal truths. Bartimaeus is one of only two healing stories in the gospels where the name of the person healed is given. The other is Lazarus. The healing of Blind Bartimaeus is told, with a few differences, in Matthew, Mark and Luke reminding us that this is a story of great importance to the writers of the Gospels and to how we understand Jesus and who Jesus is for us. The healing of Blind Bartimaeus is not the only story of healing of blindness in the gospels. Remember the story of the blind man where Jesus made mud, put it on the eyes of the blind man, and then the blind man said he had sight but it was blurry: like trees walking? Not this time.

In the story of Bartimaeus, Jesus asks “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus doesn’t assume. He asks directly: “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus doesn’t presume. Jesus gives Bartimaeus and he gives us the responsibility to name what we want Jesus to be and to do for us. It is our responsibility to learn what we need and to speak those needs clearly. And, this is a life-long process in growth in God’s grace and love. We cannot earn God’s love- it is freely given. We do not deserve God’s grace- it is freely given. All that we are – all that we can be- is because of God’s love for us, not because we deserve or earn God’s love. This is one of the main shifts from the Reformation.

Bartimaeus wouldn’t shut up. He cried out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” Those around him ordered him to be quiet but Bartimaeus persisted. He knows what he needs. He calls Jesus by name and by title: Son of David. And he calls for mercy: God’s gift to us. Bartimaeus knew that he could not regain his physical sight by his own actions. He needed God’s mercy to rejoin society whole in body and in spirit. But even though he was physically blind, Bartimaeus possessed more spiritual sight than those around him. Bartimaeus was persistent. He took action rather than waiting passively for Jesus to notice him among the crowd.

Jesus hears the cry but rather than Jesus calling to Bartimaeus to come, Jesus tells his disciples that they are to call Bartimaeus to come. Jesus did the same thing at the feeding of the 5,000. “You go and get the fish and the 5 small loaves.” “You go out two-by-two healing the world.” “You go and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

We who are disciples of Jesus are not to sit patiently waiting for Jesus to do the work. We have work to do as well. We, like Luther, are to call out when we see injustice. We are work for peace. We are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick. We are to act, not rest on our laurels.

What did it mean for Bartimaeus to see? It meant that when the disciples called him: “Take heart; get up, he is calling you” that Bartimaeus threw “off this cloak ... sprang up and came to Jesus.” And clearly, forthrightly, Bartimaeus answers the question Jesus puts to him: “What do you want me to do for you?” with “My teacher, let me see again.”

Bartimaeus, though he was blind, saw more than those around him. Bartimaeus knew who Jesus was. Bartimaeus acted on that faith through calling out to Jesus, refusing to be quiet, and when asked by Jesus what he wanted, by answering clearly and forthrightly. For those actions, Bartimaeus regained his physical sight and followed Jesus on the way. Bartimaeus’s spiritual sight gave him insights and courage that those who had only physical sight did not.

Bartimaeus shed his status as a beggar and followed Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and the cross. The faith of Bartimaeus, from before he ever met Jesus, led him to seek wholeness and health. It gave him courage to get up and follow Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross. Bartimaeus was reformed as he shed one identity for another as a result of his faith.

Our insert this morning tells the story of a chance encounter on the streets of Philadelphia between Mary MacGregor and a beggar. This beggar, like Bartimaeus, was not afraid to cry out. This beggar, like Bartimaeus, praised God for the blessings bestowed even when others might not see anything to be thankful for.

Mary ends her reflection by asking us a few questions. One is to reflect upon a time when we were deeply aware of God's provision- God's presence- in our lives. Secondly to consider when God has been the giver to us. And then to consider whether we give out of obligation or thankfulness. I hope that you are continuing the practice of writing down one thing each day that you are thankful for. This is one way to help us re-form: to change our mindset so that we learn to give out of thankfulness and not out of obligation. God waits for us to re-form: to turn towards God not out of obligation but rather in joy and thankfulness, understanding and rejoicing that in God we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

The Psalmist gives us the model: "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth ... [and] Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in him" (Ps. 34: 1, 8). Be like Bartimaeus. Cry out for Jesus. Be active in your faith. See beyond this world to the eternal truths, including that God loves us. **Amen.**