

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 REFORMATION/CONFIRMATION

Mark 10:46-52
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 October 28, 2012

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE - (Thanks for the surprise supper!)

Kids, do you see the **little pickers** that I have in this plastic sandwich bag? I was out in the woods getting ready for hunting season last Monday and when I came home, I had all of these pickers stuck to my pants and shirt. Has that ever happened to you? What are they?

You guessed it! These are **seed pods** that plants produce. God made them sticky like this so that when birds, animals or people brush against them, the pods will **stick** to them. Then when the people move around, the seed pods can get carried to new places. In those new places, when the seed pods fall off, a **new plant, a new life** can get started. That way there can always be more and more plants growing in more and more places. Pretty neat right?

God works like that in other ways besides just sticky seed pods. When you were baptized, God's **Holy Spirit** came into your life. **God's Spirit sticks to us** something like seed pods do, only on the **inside**. The Holy Spirit lives in our hearts and will never leave us. The Holy Spirit moves in us to **plant seeds of faith in Jesus**. The Holy Spirit moves in us to **bring us life**. And the Holy Spirit moves through us to **bring life to all of the places that we** go as we walk around in God's amazing world.

Today some of your big sisters and brothers, tenth graders, are getting **confirmed**. They received God's Holy Spirit when they were baptized. God's Spirit has been moving around in their hearts ever since. Today God's Spirit will help these big kids to **claim Jesus as their best friend and God**. And do you know what? If these kids, now becoming adults, **ever forget or get angry at God**, the Holy **Spirit won't give up** on them. The Holy Spirit will **stick with them** just like these seed pods stuck to my clothes. Only the Holy Spirit will be on their insides and can't ever be brushed off. And the **Holy Spirit will keep on trying to love and give life, hope and joy** to these confirmands the rest of their lives and forever. The Holy Spirit will always be moving to **help them to trust God and love God back**. **The Spirit will do that for all of us**. Thanks be to God. Amen

ADULT MESSAGE

Long ago, there was a man, blind and hopeless. His blindness left him sitting beside a road begging for his food and for his life. The place where he sat was located between a prosperous city and a fertile plain. Yet all that he had was what the generosity of others would give him. There was no Medical Assistance, Social Security or Obama Care.

Jesus came by in the midst of a crowd of people. The fellow hollered out, “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**” This is the first person in the Gospel of Mark to use this title for Jesus. It was the title reserved for the **long awaited Messiah**, the one who would rescue God’s people. Only Peter uses the term again in Mark. This blind man is somehow able to see what all of the other sighted-people have failed to realize. Maybe it’s easier to see Jesus as your help and salvation when things are **desperate** in your life? Maybe it is easier to welcome Jesus into your life when you are **overwhelmed in your struggle to survive** in a most difficult world. Maybe when you just **can’t do it by yourself any longer**, you can more clearly **see God there waiting to give hope and help**.

“**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**” The crowd around Jesus tried to silence the blind man. You shouldn’t be bothering the great teacher you know. But the man just cried out again, a second time. How often do the people around Jesus get in the way of others who are trying to draw near? Does this crowd here at First Lutheran ever turn people away from Jesus by using disapproving glances, raised noses, turned backs, or easy gossip? Are there folks that we think shouldn’t be hanging around the people of God?

The blind man’s name was “**Bartimaeus**.” This blind, destitute man has a name. Have you ever noticed how so many people in the Bible are not named? Have you ever noticed how many insignificant, disreputable, broken, wounded, hated people get names in **God’s Book**? Tax collectors, teenage virgins, elderly parents, demon possessed women, clueless disciples and blind men – **named** as they come into the presence of **Jesus, Son of David, Messiah**. A few weeks ago, we heard about the young, **wealthy man** who did everything right. We never heard his name. Week after week we hear about the **religious elite** who are attacking Jesus – no names. Jesus stopped for hurting, needy **Bartimaeus** and told the crowd, “**Call him here**.” The people around the blind man immediately

sensed that his lucky day had come. They told Bartimaeus, “**Take heart; get up, he is calling you.**” Here for the **hopeless man** was **hope at last.**

Do you know anything about being blind? A beggar? Hopeless? The people in Martin Luther’s day did. Their world was wracked with sickness, violence and death. It was full of people who were interested only in taking care of themselves. Their political and religious leaders had turned the Christian church into a **corrupt, leaching and legalistic obstacle** that actually stood between hurting, needy people and the God who loved them.

Sometimes maybe our world looks a lot like that too. At our recent sophomore-parent confirmation retreat, I asked for each person to anonymously fill out a little **God Card**. I asked them to share questions, doubts or struggles that they have with God, the Bible or the Church. Some of the most frequent responses were:

- Why does God allow so many bad things to happen in the world?
- Why do I need to feel guilty about not getting to church very much?
- Why are churches so political, divided and judgmental?

It was a bad thing that Bartimaeus was blind and had to beg. He wasn’t in church. Even Jesus’ very first disciples couldn’t agree about what Jesus was trying to teach them. But, **Jesus didn’t let any of that stop his mission to bring life and healing** into a very real and hurting world. This Gospel text is not talking about boring religion or about the notion that going to church is for wimps. This Jesus is the One who brings hope and help into the very face of life’s worst times.

Jesus asks blind, beggar Bartimaeus, “**What do you want me to do for you?**” That’s the same question that Jesus asked a couple of his disciples in last week’s Gospel lesson. **They** responded, “**We want to sit next to your throne when you come into your glory.**” Jesus told them that he was headed for service, suffering and a cross. In this very next passage, Jesus’ march ends him up at the neediest guy in town. “**What do you want me to do for you?**” Bartimaeus blurts out, “**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.”

While the people of the world get all hung up in religion, judgment and self-preservation, Jesus uses **faith** to **heal people**. Jesus brought that poor

man out from under the darkness of blindness, poverty and isolation. Jesus brings people like you and me out from under the darkness of chemical dependency, depression, poverty, loneliness, hopelessness...

Faith is God's gift to us. God is here for us whether we have faith or not. **Faith is where our seeking heart meets a trustworthy and loving God.** Faith is where healing takes root. God knows your name. God knows your gifts. God knows your needs. God knows your hopes and dreams. God's Holy Spirit literally dwells within you and knows you better than you know yourself. God is your best advocate for deep, rich and abundant life.

Our confirmands live in a world where:

- People have hopes and dreams.
- Everyone faces challenges and struggles.
- Sickness, murder, hunger and war are in the always in the news.
- Some have faith and others don't.

Luther took a stand 500 years ago. He:

- Rediscovered the **love and grace of God** for all people.
- Heard the invitation to **love and trust God back.**
- Received the **promise of joyful, abundant life in God's care.**
- **Shared the Good News with anyone who would listen.**

And the Good News wasn't just words. The Good News literally went out into the world by **word and deed.** God's love clung to the hearts and lives of hurting and needy people. It brought food and clothes, compassion, mercy and healing wherever it went. It visited God's faithful people. It visited anyone in need. It visited people who had never even heard of God.

Our confirmands wrote wonderful **Mission Statements** for their future lives. They see God at work to help them to **keep the faith**; continue to **worship**, and to use their **God-given gifts to bring healing, hope and beauty to our world.** On those **God Cards** from our retreat, the participants spoke of the apparent **shortcomings** of our church and world. But, they also spoke of **hopefulness** for the future. When asked, on those anonymous cards, to consider their **commitment to God** during the year ahead, they responded:

- Worship more themselves
- Read the Bible more
- Make a positive difference in the world.
- Invite friends to worship
- Be less judgmental

These kids are **already inviting people** to walk with Jesus. Some of them wouldn't even be here if not for having been invited by their friends. They told me so in their confirmation interviews. They told me how **thankful** that they are **for God** being a part of their everyday lives and world. They told me how much they **appreciate the amazing world** that we live in and how much they **want to help God** to take care of it, heal it, and renew it.

Jesus found blind, beggar Bartimaeus and healed him 2,000 years ago. Today, Jesus is still on the road, on the march, on the way to where we are. Jesus still **calls us by name, picks us out of the crowd, and invites us to trust him** with all of our **blind nesses, hurts and needs**. Jesus invites us to trust him with all of our **hopes and dreams**.

If, on the other hand, you **wander off** from God, **slip away** during the dark night of your soul, **throw your relationship with God in the trash** – God will still be there. If you think that God is going to **just sit around twiddling thumbs** while waiting for you to come crawling home to God, you've got another think coming. **No, God will be wherever you are**. God will go in **hot pursuit** to bring you home, to love and forgive, to heal and renew.

We have it all backwards if we think that **God needs us**. God doesn't need us, but God loves and wants us enough to live and walk in our shoes, to suffer and serve with us, to die and rise again to give us God's own life now and forever. **We have it all backwards** if we think that **faith, prayer and worship are things that God needs**. No, we need them. God gives faith, prayer and worship for our sake, for our life and well-being. Faith, prayer and worship are ways that God uses **to call us and to keep us in the loving, life-giving embrace of God**. God doesn't need us, but God loves us. And **we need God**. That's what our young adult confirmands will be saying to this congregation today. **Do they mean it** when they say that they love God? **I think so**. **Does Jesus mean it** when he says that he loves them? I am **absolutely certain**.

We are not whole, not complete, until we are resting, renewed and empowered by **God's love and trust relationship with us**. **Bartimaeus, Peyton, Katherine, Camille, Jordan, Zachary, Molly, Sydney, Jeremy, Erik, Elizabeth**, our **confirmands**, our **little people, you and me** – **God certainly loves us**. Today, we **love and trust God back**... And tomorrow, **God will still be there for us too**. **That gives me lots of hope**. How about you? Thanks be to God. Amen.

