*Gracious and loving God*

*You call us to be stewards of your*

*Abundance, the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us*

*Help us always to use your gifts wisely*

*And teach us to share them generously*

*Send the Holy Spirit to work through us*

*Bringing your message to those we serve*

*May our faithful stewardship bear*

*Witness to the love of Jesus Christ in our lives*

*Refresh us so that we may honor his great name.*

*Amen*.

Good morning! Good morning at home!

Last week, when we read Mark's account of how the Zebedee's royally misconstruing how the authority structure of the Kingdom of God works, you'd be forgiven for thinking that this episode could cause enough of a problem among Christ's disciples that Jesus' preaching and healing roadshow was headed for a real stopping point. Even by the tenth chapter of Mark, The Zebedee brothers, and really the rest of the disciples, still have yet to fully grasp the true nature of Jesus' messianic vocation. They've yet to have their minds blown away by the Jesus' cross and passion, his resurrection and ascension. In a sense, they were still *blind* to everything that Jesus was up to, everything that his Kingdom would entail.

But even if they weren't quite able to see the whole picture, Jesus' work stayed on track. And along the way, there would continue to be little glimpses as to what the disciples were missing. Today, our dear Bartamaeus fits the bill. Now Bartamaeus was at a severe disadvantage in the ancient world being blind. He couldn't move as freely through the world of his friends and neighbors. Surely, he wouldn't have the senses to apprehend this Jesus character, right? Interestingly, though, he seems to have had an advantage on the Zebedees. Perhaps he's listened especially well to the scribes and rabbi's sermons because despite his lack of sight, thus he's picked out who Jesus is and discerned what he's capable of.

And when Jesus walked by him, Bartamaeus called out to Jesus as the Son of David. In using that title, he's made the same claim of Jesus that Jesus has made of himself. As the Son, or descendent of David, Jesus is part of a royal family, a family that set aside for God's glory long before his birth. At one point in David's story, David promised God that he would a temple to house God's glory. God said, "thanks but no thanks" and instead preferred to build a house for Himself out of David's family. Which, as a side note, seems an ever more remote possibility the more you read 2 Samuel through 2 Kings. And yet, Jesus was the fulfillment of that ancient promise, even if it wouldn't be in the way that so many people expected at the time.

So, our friend Bartamaeus has identified Jesus as the heir to this promise. He called out to Jesus, "Have mercy on me!" he called, in the expectation that this man, imbued with great grace and promise, would do something amazing for him. Jesus did not disappoint, of course, and when Bartamaeus petitioned for the return of his sight, Jesus quickly obliged, and remarked that his faith had served Bartamaeus well. Mark reports that Bartamaeus' response was to follow Jesus along the way.

Now the restoration of sight is, as healing signs is concerned, pretty much part of Jesus' greatest hits throughout the Gospels. Almost certainly, he heals the sight of the blind as the fulfillment of the messianic promise of the Isaiah scroll (which is a fun part of Luke 4 if you want some homework), further cementing his messianic role in God's plan for salvation. This little episode should raise up a whole bunch of little lightbulbs for readers of the Old Testament, and therefore the folks around Jesus and maybe even Bartamaeus.

But this story also makes a fun contrast even in the Gospel of Mark: this blind dude gets it while the closest disciples seem to miss key details over and over. It's as if they themselves have blind spots, and it seems as if the only way to get those blind spots taken care of is to approach Jesus in faith.

It begs a question for our spiritual life this week. What are my blind spots as a disciple of Jesus? We ought to ask that of him in prayer. We ought to ask him in the expectation that he will heal us of whatever we are. I will tell you that the biggest spiritual blind spot I see in my line of work is actually the same as the earliest disciples. Even with the hindsight of the fullness of the story, I meet so many people who still have trouble letting Jesus be their Savior. Even the blind man, Bartamaeus was able to know that Jesus would be the one to restore him, to love him, and to guide him on the path towards peace with God and his brothers and sisters, on the path towards righteousness and an Eternity with God, and away from sin and death. My friends, if that is not something you've considered for yourself this morning, please allow what grace hovers among us to open your heart to Christ's salvation. If you know people who need the gentle healing of God's anointed one, and who need a path to trod with him, pray that the same grace would open in their hearts. For me, I always pray that Jesus would continually remind me that he is the one who does the work of salvation, not me. I pray that he would keep me humble, walking along the same path with him as Bartamaeus. And as Jesus heals us our blind spots, let us look forward to the hope of God, when we can proclaim God's restoration like the psalmist who awaited the restoration of Zion and who prayed:

*Then was our mouth filled with laughter, \**

*and our tongue with shouts of joy.*

*Then they said among the nations, \**

*"The Lord has done great things for them."*

*The Lord has done great things for us, \**

*and we are glad indeed.*

To Him be all Glory; from age to age. Amen.