**22 Pentecost, October 28, 2012, Mark 10: 46-52; The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Author Mercer Mayer a popular children's book called, "There's a nightmare in my closet." It is about a huge scary monster that comes out of the closet when the lights go out in a little child's bedroom--the purpose of the book is to dispel a child's **fear of** **the dark**. When I was a child, my sisters and I used to talk about *"goblins*" and the "*bogey man.*" It's Halloween week, a time when we think about scary things in the dark, like monsters and haunted houses. Darkness is just the absence of light, and in itself is nothing to be feared. But, darkness is a symbol of all kinds of things that cause people to be scared -- like danger and depression and shadows. In the Bible, darkness was one of the plagues in Exodus (10:21) and the location of “***weeping and gnashing of teeth***” (Matthew 8:12). We all have experienced dark times in our lives in one way or another. The Gospels lately have been about the kind of darkness called spiritually blindness: the inability to see Jesus' message of love, compassion, and salvation. Today's Gospel is about all kinds of blindness, and so it speaks to each of us, no matter what our circumstance. The Gospel challenges us in four different ways -- calling each of us to reflect about how we see God in our dark times. Let's walk through the Gospel, and learn from each of those four challenges.

The Gospel begins with a continuation of Jesus' road trip to Jerusalem. They were leaving the town of Jericho, and along the road there was a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus probably was at the same spot every day, hoping to appeal to the generosity of one of those traveling along that road. It was a busy road, so he must have heard lots of voices going by on any given day. But on this particular day, he heard the voice of a man that he recognized as extraordinary --the voice of ***Jesus of Nazareth***. He wanted nothing more than to meet Jesus, so he called for Jesus' attention. It was not just random shouting for help: he said in a loud voice, "***Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."*** By saying these words, Bartimaeus acknowledged that Jesus was God's son, that Jesus was divine, that Jesus was the great healer. It showed his faith. People in the crowd told him to be quiet, but he would not do as they told him. He shouted out again, "***Son of David, have mercy on me."*** This part of the story brings us our first challenge: ask yourself **who Jesus is to you**. Do you recognize that Jesus is God, and Lord of your life? We see here who Jesus is to Bartimaeus: He is Messiah. Who is Jesus to you? Do you shout out, acknowledging Him, showing persistence in your wanting to meet Him, no matter what others around you are saying? Your spiritual journey begins in earnest when you recognize Jesus Christ for who He is and can be in your life.

The second challenge has to do with our **reaction to God's presence** in our lives. Jesus stops and calls Bartimaeus to come to Him. How did Bartimaeus react to this invitation? The Gospel says that he did not sit there and wait for Jesus to come to him, he did not take his time. No, Bartimaeus did three things: he threw "***off his cloak, he sprang up, and he came to Jesus."*** The reality of Bartimaeus' life was dark in many ways, for not was he blind but he was an outcast from society, living on the street. So, for him to throw off his cloak was a huge gesture of surrender -- his cloak represented his home, his warmth, his security. And, he did not just let it slip from his shoulders - he quickly left his source of security behind looking with hope for what was ahead. This provides us an example of total response to Jesus, not holding back. His cloak was part of his old life, and he knew with complete confidence that he was about to be given new life from the Savior. After he threw off the cloak, he "***sprang up, and came to Jesus***"- quickly, with all his energy. So, our challenge here to ask ourselves, "How do I react to Jesus' invitation? Jesus says to us, "***Come to me all the who are heavy laden and I will refresh you."*** Are you tentative in your reaction, holding back part of yourself or lugging the stuff that is not of God with you? Or are you like Bartimaeus, fully present, fully surrendered.

The third challenge for us has to do with **prayer**. Jesus invited Bartimaeus to tell Him what he wanted. Bartimaeus did not shy away from asking for what he needed, he did not assume Jesus knew what he wanted -he just stated it clearly. How did Jesus respond? He immediately healed Bartimaeus, giving him what he wanted. So, what does this have to do with our prayer life? Plenty. Following the example of Bartimaeus, we need to pray our specific requests to God, with confident faith. Not only does God care about what we need, but God answers our prayers. So many people I meet are good at praying for the needs of others, but don't go to God with their own needs....this happens out of fear (*fear that they won't get what they ask for*), out of a sense of disbelief (*not believing that God can actually heal today*), or out of a sense of unworthiness (*feeling that God doesn't really care*). When we ask God for something and verbalize our needs, it's like we are throwing out a line that Jesus will pull on to draw us closer to Himself. Prayer is the connecting link formed between God and us-- where His strength and stability can become ours. The more we pray, the stronger that line becomes and the closer we get to God. Jesus does not mind being troubled by us. He heals, He performs miracles, and He answers our prayers. We do not understand why God provides physical cures for some people and not others, but we know He answers all prayers, in His way and in His time-and He always heals us in some way - in unexpected ways sometimes-- when we pray for healing. God is still performing miracles among us today.

Our fourth and last challenge of this Gospel has to do with **our response** to God's action in our lives. It has to do with what Bartimaeus does **after** he is healed. The last verse in today's Gospel says that he "***followed him on the way***." In other words, Bartimaeus became a follower of Jesus. He joined the disciples in the road trip to Jerusalem - to the cross. So, our challenge is how do we respond to God's presence in our lives, to God's love, to God's blessings? When we see that God answered our prayers, how do we react? Do we get more serious about being followers of Christ? Do we yearn to know more about Him in order to be more faithful followers, or do we just go on with our lives and forget about it? When we truly understand and appreciate the active work of Christ in our lives, it will be the most natural thing of our spirit to want to follow Him.

Two true stories: Barbara and Mike. There is no medical reason why Barbara is still living today. At the age of 39, she suffered a severe brain hemorrhage. She was in a coma in ICU for three weeks and given up for dead, but she was prayed for by many people -- some who knew her and some who did not. Barbara miraculously emerged from the coma with a normal brain; there is no medical explanation. She went back to college and is now a teacher, a writer of children's books, a world traveler, and she thanks God everyday for God's healing. Second story: There is no logical explanation for who Mike has become today. Mike was despondent: he had lost his job and family. But one day, he found himself accepting someone's help and prayers. Mike eventually learned about Christian hope, got an apartment and a job, made new friends and now is a devoted member of a church helping others. Like Bartimaeus, Barbara and Mike followed Jesus.

God is victorious over the physical brokenness of the world, God is the provider of new life, God brings light into darkness. God brought Bartimaeus from dark into light, and He can bring you from darkness into light. What are you clinging to in your life that you are reluctant to throw off. What is getting in the way of your crying out to and trusting in Jesus? What is the barrier to your following Him? Throw off these barriers and run to Him, hold nothing back, and look forward to His Light filling you. **Let us pray. God of healing and hope, come to us this day. Thank you for asking us what we want. Please touch us with your graceful heart, fill us with your light, and become for us new vision for faithful living. All in the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ, our living Lord. Amen.**