

Semicontinuous  
**Job 42:1–6, 10–17**  
**Ps. 34:1–8 (19–22)**

Complementary  
**Jer. 31:7–9**  
**Ps. 126**

**Heb. 7:23–28**  
**Mark 10:46–52**

# Faith that Heals

**Goal for the Session**      *Witnessing Bartimaeus’s faith that made him well, adults will hear and respond to Jesus’ words of mercy.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Mark 10:46–52

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” A. K. M. Adam

The directness with which Jesus accepts the connection between the “Son of David” and the Anointed One should caution us not to construct invidious distinctions between “political” and “spiritual” messiahship. In the final verse of the pericope, Jesus indicates that Bartimaeus’s faith has “made [him] well” (NRSV), or “healed” (NIV) or “saved” (NJB) him. The Greek verb in question, *sōzō*, serves for salvation from both physical and spiritual dangers. Although both meanings resonate in Mark’s usage, the more ordinary Greek sense (“rescue”) should prevail.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Victor McCracken

The Bartimaeus episode serves as the culmination of a section of Mark’s Gospel in which Jesus confronts not only the physical blindness of Bartimaeus but, more significantly, the spiritual blindness of his closest followers who have failed to fully grasp the upside-down kingdom that Christ has brought near to the world. Thus, while the healing of blind Bartimaeus is first of all about Jesus’ response to Bartimaeus’s need, theologically the story serves as a metonym for the work of Christ, who in his journey to Jerusalem is seeking to cure the spiritual blindness of his disciples. This interplay between the blindness of those Jesus confronts on the way to Jerusalem and the sight-giving power that Jesus enacts in word and deed heightens the christological claim at the heart of the passage: not even the blindness of his closest followers can impede the work of Christ in the world.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Cynthia A. Jarvis

Following Jesus, we need not scold those who have no idea what they want Jesus to do for them, nor call their faithfulness into question. Rather, as we call the community to attend to the other’s cry for mercy, whether the other is as distant as Darfur or as close as the closet, we obediently gather a crowd around what God is doing in the world “to make and keep human life human.” The cry of need that caused Bartimaeus to be shunned by many becomes the occasion for their glimpse of God’s final intention for creation in ordinary time.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Lincoln E. Galloway

Bartimaeus is a model of discipleship because he is a person of faith (10:52). His capacity to see and comprehend reminds us that the disciples seem not to perceive or understand, to see or to hear (8:14–21). In this passage, Jesus draws attention to the faith of Bartimaeus (cf. 2:5); and we are invited through the words of Jesus to see the relationship between faith and wholeness, faith and salvation. These elements are powerfully combined when we hear and respond to the words of mercy: Go, your faith has made you well. Go, your faith has healed you. Go, your faith has made you whole.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Mark 10:46–52**

## Focus on Your Teaching

In some cities, growing numbers of sick and homeless people sit at entrances to grocery stores and stand on corners with signs. How do your adults respond? Today's focus scripture tells of the interaction between Jesus, the disciples, and a blind man and offers the chance to rethink responses to marginalized persons in our midst. In this text, the story is told of Bartimaeus, a blind man. This disability is singled out as it parallels the spiritual "blindness" that challenges Jesus' followers. Be sensitive to your participants who live with physical challenges. Take care to show them dignity and compassion as modeled by Jesus.

*Gracious God, illumine me with your spirit that I may understand, and in understanding, teach your good news. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for November 1, 2015

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, prepare someone to act like Bartimaeus for the scripture reading. Have the volunteer arrive before the session and sit in the corner covered with a coat. The person should be visible to the group and not hiding. Rehearse with the volunteer to practice his or her participation in the reading of the focus scripture at the beginning of Exploring. If using option 3 in Responding, invite a community ministry leader to talk about the marginalized people the ministry serves.

Welcome participants and introduce any visitors. Ask them to think about instances when they have seen people asking for help or money in public. Have them think in silence about various ways they respond in these situations and how they see others respond. Have them silently consider whether they have responded in these ways:

- ✠ I avoid eye contact and keep moving.
- ✠ I look the person in the eye and say I am sorry but I can't help them.
- ✠ I empty my pockets of any loose change I have and give it to them.
- ✠ I give them an evil eye to show them I disapprove of what they are doing.
- ✠ I offer to buy them a meal.
- ✠ I engage them in conversation and provide them with whatever they need.

Invite brief comments about other ways participants have responded. Tell them that they will explore Jesus' response to a blind man who calls out to him from the side of the road.

Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

*God of all, thank you for this time to study your Word with others. Be with those who are unable to be here today. Open our hearts and minds as we seek to do your will. Amen.*

Bartimaeus calls Jesus “Son of David” twice, connecting Jesus with Jewish history. This is the first instance where this title is used in Mark’s Gospel. It signals that Jesus is the anointed Messiah from the house of David.

*Metonym* is a word or expression used as a substitute for something with which it is closely associated. Here, Jesus offers physical as well as spiritual healing.

## EXPLORING

Prepare the group to read Mark 10:46–52. Assign the role of Jesus to a volunteer and have the participants be the crowd and disciples. You will be the narrator. Read the text with the assigned parts. Bartimaeus will throw off his or her coat and join the group during the reading. Ask:

- ✎ Which two people in the story most connected?
- ✎ Why did you disciples and crowd try to keep Bartimaeus quiet and away from Jesus?
- ✎ Bartimaeus, you threw off your cloak, probably your most prized possession, which kept you warm at night. What does it mean that you simply threw it off?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Mark 10:46–52), and read the “What?” excerpt. Ask:

- ✎ Bartimaeus was saved from physical danger by having his sight restored. What spiritual dangers might he have been rescued from?

Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (Theological Perspective) and have participants read it. Have a volunteer read the “Where?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Clarify the word *metonym* from the information in the sidebar. Ask:

- ✎ Disciples, how was Jesus showing you your own blindness?
- ✎ What did you not see?
- ✎ What were you missing?

Imagine the conversation between the disciples/crowd and the blind man as he went with them and Jesus after regaining his sight. Ask:

- ✎ What did you say to him, disciples?
- ✎ What did you say to one another?
- ✎ What did you learn from this experience?

To prepare for Responding, read the “So What?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1 and briefly review the three statements Bartimaeus made when making his request of Jesus. Ask:

- ✎ What can be said about Bartimaeus from the way he speaks and what he says to Jesus?
- ✎ How did Jesus give dignity and respect to Bartimaeus?
- ✎ What can we learn from Bartimaeus’ responses about how to ask God for what we need?

## RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Prepare for a Next Encounter** In this activity, participants will imagine their next encounter with someone in need and role play how they will offer the person dignity and respect. Remind participants of the conversation in Gathering about concrete ways for responding to people asking for help.

Have participants imagine a situation in which they encounter a homeless person or a person with a disability asking for assistance. In pairs, role play an imaginary conversation in which they offer help, dignity, and respect in the imagined situation.

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2. **Guided Meditation** In this activity, you will lead participants in a brief meditation involving an encounter with a person seeking healing. Invite participants to sit comfortably and close their eyes while you lead them in a guided meditation. Use these words or something like them:

Imagine that you are walking out the door of a pharmacy. You notice a woman seated on the ground, leaning against the wall of the building. Her hand is bandaged. There are several bags of pharmacy purchases on the ground next to her. As you walk past her you notice that she's looking at your face, perhaps looking to make eye contact with you. You catch her eye but do not speak. Let the scene play out in your mind.

After a brief silence, ask:

- ✧ What are you thinking and feeling in this scene?
- ✧ How do you think the woman is feeling?
- ✧ How might you respond to her?
- ✧ If someone walks past, how might that person react? The woman? You?

After the meditation, form pairs and have participants tell one another one thing they will do differently in their next encounter with a person needing help.

3. **Supporting Local Ministries** In this activity, participants will have a conversation with a ministry leader who serves marginalized people in your congregation or community. Invite a community ministry leader to come talk about showing dignity and respect to the persons with whom they work. Conclude the activity discussing ways participants can get involved and support the congregational or community ministry.

## CLOSING

To summarize the content of the session, have participants read the “Now What?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Invite people to name one thing they will take with them.

Close with this charge:

*As a people of faith, see God's presence around you in the people you meet.  
Look upon one another with the mercy that God shows to you.  
Pray for those you encounter this day.  
Go with God, your faith has made you well.  
Go with Christ, your faith has healed you.  
Go with the Spirit, your faith has made you whole.*

Let everyone say, “Amen.”

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for November 1, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

## Focus on Mark 10:46–52

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## Theological Perspective

The principal Christological claim of this text is clear. Jesus, coming face-to-face with the imploring cries of a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, heals him with a simple word, “Go; your faith has made you well.” At its most basic level, the passage proclaims that power of Christ demonstrated in the healing of a beggar whom the crowds want to silence. This is the compassionate Christ who brings near the good news of God’s victory over the physical brokenness of the world.

Stories of Jesus’ restoring sight stand as bookends to a section in Mark’s Gospel which is unified by the theme of blindness: physical and spiritual blindness.

- 8:22–26 Jesus restores sight to a blind man in Bethsaida.
- 8:31–33 Jesus foretells his suffering, rejection, and death while Peter rebukes him for speaking of these things.
- 9:30–32 Jesus again tells of his betrayal, suffering, and death. His disciples are confused by the message.
- 9:33–34 Jesus’ disciples argue about who will be the greatest.
- 10:35–40 James and John request positions at Jesus’ right and left hands in his glory.
- 10:41 Jesus’ disciples express anger toward James and John at their presumptiveness.
- 10:46–53 Jesus restores sight to Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus’ healing is a culmination of Jesus’ work confronting the physical blindness of one outside his close-knit followers and the spiritual blindness of those close to Jesus who have failed to fully grasp the kingdom which Jesus brings near.

—From Victor McCracken, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 212 and 214.

