

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' 49 Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' 52 Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. Mark 10: 46-52 (NRSV)

What is the miracle in this story?

That a former blind man is able to see again?

That somebody got healed who had been sick before?

But, what has this story to do with our lives today, when the miracle is that someone with an illness is made healthy again and we stay ill although we believe in God and pray to him? Someone is able to see again, and there are blind people among us who believe in Jesus as Bartimäus did...

If this is the miracle, that Bartimäus is healthy again, if this is the essential point of the story...

What shall we pray when we have cancer?

What shall someone pray who is ill with HIV?

What shall a family pray who has lost a child – that the boy or girl shall be resurrected?

Surely the cure of one person cannot be the point of the story! In "New Testament Theology", this story is not a story about a miracle. We are missing the main characteristics like the background of the story of Bartimäus, a gesture of healing and a word of healing.

It is **not** a story about a miracle; **it is a story about faith!**

Reflecting about faith by meditating on this story, the main point is not how to become healthy again, but:

What is the primary purpose of my life?

How do I notice others and myself?

How much confidence do I have in the capability of others?

And how much self-confidence do I have?

Asking like that the story suddenly has a totally different focus.

Let us follow this path of faith, let us discover where this path begins and let us try to develop a sense of where this path may lead us.

The external requirements for a happy-end for Bartimäus are appalling.

Bartimäus – son of Timäus – son of the glorified one. The title of his father is far from the daily life of Bartimäus. He is a beggar, blind, sitting along the dirty road.

An individual, battered by life, without any prospects.

And then came the crowd of people around Jesus and his disciples. The son of the glorified one, sitting there, ignored.

A beggar and blind – is there anything that can be expected of him?

That is how we still treat people we meet today who are on the losing side of life. A woman living in a nursing home, a man on his deathbed. Is there anything that can be expected from them?

But appearances are deceiving. Bartimäus is on the losing-side of life. He is an individual on the wayside, overlooked all the time, he cannot expect more than a handout, one or two small coins – but he has not lost confidence in himself.

What is he able to do? He is able to listen, to catch something. He is handicapped, but by no means unable to live or without talent.

We still have to learn, that handicapped people are not without talents. Their talents, however, may be different from an able-bodied person.

When you cannot see because of blindness or because of too many people around you, you have to listen all the more. When you cannot walk because of your lameness, you have to shout all the more.

We still have to learn not to label an apparently handicapped person to their one handicap.

Let us not rob the voice of the blind one. Let us not rob the eye of the deaf one. Let us not rob the ear of the voiceless one. Let us not rob the heart of the lame one. And let us not rob the dignity and the hope of the poor one, by telling all of them: Oh, you poor handicapped guy, you are not able to do something. Let me do it for you!

No, let us learn to feel and to realize the special abilities, which exist:

How the blind one is able to teach us to talk. How the deaf one is able to teach us to see. How the voiceless one is able to teach us to listen. How the lame one is able to teach us to love and the poor one to teach us to hope.

When Bartimäus heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out...

The blind Bartimäus is all ears. He listens and hears who the crowd is talking about. His competence and his faith are revealed: He is able to listen; he is able to cry, to cry for mercy; he has a will of his own; he realizes his chance; there is still hope in him; and shortly after he is able to stand up and run, blind, towards Jesus.

He does not allow the crowd to get rid of him, he is a pain in the neck; he does not allow the crowd to reduce him to his blindness. This is the opportunity of his lifetime and he is determined to grasp it.

But the more he shows what he wants the higher the barriers, the louder the noise around him.

Try to read the bible text by paying attention to the accumulation of noise: twelve disciples arriving with Jesus, many people joining them, talking, laughing, crying, a crowd of people, ...

The noise is accumulating until we arrive in the middle of the Bible text. Barriers mounting up for the one who wants to be listened to.

Then, in the middle of these proceedings: Silence. In the midst of the noise, the restlessness, in the midst of the bible text: **“And Jesus stood still...!”**

He is all ears, listening to this scream for light. Imagine Jesus turning into an ear in the midst of this noise to be able to hear Bartimäus.

This is the hope of the blind ones that we turn into an ear; the hope of the voiceless ones that we turn into an eye; the hope of the lame ones that we turn into a heart; this is the hope of the Christian faith that we turn into human beings.

That we discover the dignity of our neighbor; that we do not rob him of his dignity, but call his skills into the daylight.

“And Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’”

Calling the blind one, waking up, touching and demanding all of his skills. Jesus does not say: Bring him to me, take him by his hands. Jesus does not say: Bring me to Bartimäus; he is such a poor person.

Quite the contrary: attracting life, challenging the will and the sleeping power.

Call him here. He has ears, even if he is blind. He has healthy legs, even if he is blind. He is able to stand up, he has to show his will!

Do not make someone look small, do not choke someone by pretending love.

„Call him here!“ – and the blind man, still blind(!), is able to take the right direction, throws off his coat, jumps up as a blind man can jump up and came to Jesus.

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”

This is the second birth of human life to meet this question: "What do I really want to do with my life?"

What do you want me to do for you?

We have to know that! Which direction do we want to take in our life?

This is not an unnecessary question, either for healthy or for sick people, as we can see in the story of the lame man lying next to the pool Bethesda. Jesus asked him: "Do you want to be made well?", and the lame man did not have an answer. Or remember James and John. When Jesus asked them: "What is it you want me to do for you?" ...they want him to share his power...

Which wishes do we have?

How concrete is our faith? How much has our faith to do with the protection of life, the dignity of everyone's life, the future of our planet?

According to the New Testament, our faith has not to be a huge or a giant one. The size of a mustard seed is enough to let the tree of life grow...

The blind man said to him, '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.

What is the miracle in this story?

It is not the fact that Bartimäus is able to see again, but rather his faith and how this faith becomes visible.

What it has to do with faith and a miracle is this:

That a handicapped person is not only his or her handicap. Bartimäus is more than his handicap. He is able to cry, to resist, he knows what he wants to have, he is screaming for light, he is a pain in the neck, he wants to be listened to, his skills are called into the daylight, he stands up, he runs, he knows his direction... because...

Because Jesus finds him. Because Jesus does not make him look small. Because Jesus asks for what he is able to give.

Bartimäus experiences a second birth in his life. Bartimäus follows Jesus. Not **because** he is able to see, but **even though** he is now able to see. The first event he sees on his way as a follower of Jesus is:

The passion, the suffering of Jesus.

He does not wear rose-colored glasses as a healed person. What he sees, is:

Overcoming and Collapsing, Healing and Dying, Victory and Defeat, Death and Life.

Will his faith be strong enough to bear it?

The healing of Bartimäus is imbedded between the stories of Jesus' passion. The healing is a sign of the one who will die.

And we can learn:

The faith, which was necessary for the healing, does not lead us into paradise.

Faith does not create paradise conditions; faith does not create health for all those who believe in the right way. There will be suffering as long as this world exists. There will be diseases, handicaps, death. The fact that healing and passion are so closely connected, talks about a deep truth:

The salvation of God is also visible, when we learn to live with suffering and illness.

A Sunday Service also is a Service of Healing as soon as it helps people to bear their handicaps.

Salvation of God is among us as soon as someone experiences the community of a congregation: I am not only what I am unable to do; I am gifted as well, there is a lot of life within me.

The Salvation of God is among us as soon as broken people are not made to look poor and small, unable to express themselves. Salvation of God helps them to keep their dignity and to create wonderful things and meetings within their limitation. The Salvation of God is among us as soon as sick or dying people can realize: I am not alone, someone stays by my side!

The Salvation of God is among us as soon as we resist and withstand our own powerlessness by gazing at the suffering Christ Jesus. This is the way to experience the power of God.

Let us praise God for healing and encouraging us. Let us lament before God why there still is so much pain in this world and why there are so many questions without any answers.

Both experiences are surrounded by God's love. Both experiences teach us that salvation is more than being healthy again. Trusting in God opens many more possibilities than we can imagine.

Therefore:

teach the blind how to walk
teach the voiceless how to listen
teach the deaf how to sing
teach the lame how to laugh
teach him
to stand up
to listen and
to sing and
to laugh
to teach us poor people
about hope