

## See and Follow: Reflections on Ministry

Sermon by Rev. Katherine Raley

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Colorado Springs, CO

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### **Mark 10:46-52** New Revised Standard Version

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. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 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." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 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." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

I wonder if Bartimaeus *planned* to follow Jesus if his sight was healed. I wonder if what went through his mind when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth coming by, "He can heal me! If he heals me, I'm going to leave this town, leave my father Timaeus, leave the people I've never been able to *see*, and follow that guy wherever he goes." I kinda think that he probably had other plans in his head, a fantasy of what he would do if he *were* to miraculously be able to see again. I think he dreamed about what it would be like to *see* whatever family members he had – maybe nieces and nephews, maybe father and mother. To see the people walking by him. To see the sun that he felt on his shoulders, or the clouds that cooled him off, or the face and the hands that offered him a drink of water as he sat on the roadside and begged. He probably dreamed about what *his* hands would be able to do if they could be paired with sight – they would be able to earn him a living, so that he didn't have to beg anymore. He'd be able to contribute to his town, to his family. Maybe he'd even be able to have his *own* family! Maybe he'd *belong* again, or for the first time in his life.

Whatever dreams he had, they were worth shouting for. Not knowing exactly *where* Jesus was in the crowd, he didn't even stand up right away, he just immediately shouted – Jesus! Have mercy on me! Whatever his dreams were, they were worth shouting *even louder* when others tried to hush him – shouting without thought, with desperation – *this* was the only chance he would ever have, and he would *not* give it away to the voices of propriety.

And then his shouts were answered, and Jesus called him. Immediately he *sprang* up – I love the *energy* in that word, sprang – he sprang up and found Jesus. When Jesus asked what

he wanted, he knew exactly how to answer – Let me see again! In other words, let me do those things that I have only been able to dream about. Let me *live*. And Jesus says, OK. Go, live your dreams. Your faith has made you well.

And then, something interesting happens. Yes, more interesting than the miracle of Bartimaeus's regained sight. When his sight is healed, Bartimaeus chooses not to *go*, but to *follow*. His *faith* changed not only his physical blindness, but also his dreams, his purpose. The most important thing in that moment became *not* whatever he *had* dreamed about while he was blind, but his new dream – following the one who could give that gift in the first place, whose actions had more capacity than even this simple healing.

**When we have healthy sight, our eyes, too – our purpose – are set on following Christ on the way.**

When there is a transition near, it seems like a good time to step back and reflect on what's happened, and listen for what God is saying *might* happen. What motivations are guiding, what's been accomplished, where there is still work to be done on this journey of life-long ambition (because isn't the goal of living with a *purpose* for your life a great life-long ambition?).

When I was ordained, I made an oath. I memorized it at the time, and though I haven't *kept* it memorized, I do have it posted on my bathroom wall, there to look at as I get ready every day and get ready for sleep every night. It states: *I, Katherine Michelle Raley, dedicate myself, body, mind, and spirit, to be a minister of Jesus Christ to God's Holy Church. Through study and prayer, I will ever prepare myself for this high calling. I will: seek to exalt righteousness and rebuke evil; minister to the sick and comfort those in trouble; care faithfully for those given to my spiritual care; equip the members of the church for their spiritual mission in this world; set a worthy example before all; and serve them in the spirit of Jesus Christ my Lord.*

I took that oath, and knew *some* of what it would mean. But the ministry here with you has nuanced it and helped me to name and describe who I am and who I want to be as a

minister, my hopes for what we have done together, and how God has prepared us for our futures, though our paths are separating.

So today, on the occasion of my last sermon with you (though I'll still be around until December 6<sup>th</sup>), as we learn about a man who uses his new healthy sight to follow Christ, I want to tell you about the *sight* – the *purpose* – that I have come to have as I have ministered with you.

**My goals as a minister, as a pastor, as a person attempting to follow Christ on the way, are:**

**I. To help you discover who you are in Christ, and**

**II. To help you find loving, courageous, healing ways to interact with the world.**

That's it. Those two simple (ha!) things actually contain quite a lot, though.

I. In that first category, to help you discover who you are in Christ, there's:

1. When you have healthy sight, you *know*, without a doubt, that you are loved and good enough just as you are, even with all those terrible things you've done that you've never told anyone about, or all those things you *should* have done that you didn't.

It is in scripture over and over again – Romans 8 - nothing you do can take away God's love. John 15:9 – “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” - nothing you can do can make God love you more. You are enough. You are enough.

2. Second, when you have healthy sight, you know without a doubt that you are powerful, you are creative, and you are resourceful. You have God's strength and creative power inside of you. Because of that, God always gives you the resources to make use of God's grace – to turn any awful thing to good, to never let it have the last word, to keep moving forward. You are secure in God. You have support, if you will only ask for it, and use it. You have the support of friends, of organizations, of your pastors, of people who want only to see you succeed, not laugh in your face when you come to ask for help.

*Luke 12:22-23 – Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ...If God so clothes the [lilies] of the field,... how much more will he clothe you!*

3. Third, when you have healthy sight, you *know* that *your* journey is important. Whatever ups and downs have taken you through life, they are important. You have *never* had all the answers, and no one expects you to, even at the end of a long life. Instead, the failures, the mistakes, the sins, and the *lessons* are important steps, and to be respected and honored *for themselves*, simply because they are a part of your journey.

Who you are in Christ is *loved* and *enough*; powerful, creative, and resourceful, and a person with an *important* journey, full of mistakes, sins, and lessons.

II. In the second category – to help you find loving, courageous, healing ways to interact with the world, there are two main points I'd like you to *know*:

1. When you have healthy sight, you *know* that you will not be less powerful if you *listen* instead of *push*.

Say you need something from another person. Maybe you need them to respect your space, or your rights, or you need them to do something for you. Or, you have an opinion on how they should be acting, or what they should be doing. You will best achieve your goals of communication if you *listen* first. What's their story? What motivates them? While you are listening, you are learning how they communicate, and *then* you can tailor your request to the appropriate context and the appropriate communication style.

Sometimes, shouting might be necessary. Take Bartimaeus as an example. He read the situation well, and knew that shouting as loud as he could without being hushed was his only chance to be heard. In another example, have any of you had the unfortunate experience that you've started to talk louder, maybe even shouting, to a person who spoke a different language, or you knew was completely deaf, *even though* you know they just can't understand the words you're saying? One of my favorite movies, Spanglish, has a scene like that – Fluor

doesn't speak English, but when speaking to her at their first meeting, her new boss, Deborah, can't seem to help raising her voice to talk to her, to try to communicate with her. Eventually, her brain seems to get it, and Deb starts actually making use of others who know how to speak Spanish to communicate with Fluor.

If you listen and take a moment to learn the right way to communicate, you can achieve what you want much more quickly, or at the very least understand the other person better.

2. Finally, when you have healthy sight, you *know* that you will be happiest, most energized, most purposeful if you believe that the other person's journey is just as important as yours, including all of *their* mistakes, failures, sins, and lessons. Whether that "other person" is your spouse, your co-worker, your family member, a refugee or immigrant, the annoying person on the political ad, a person receiving welfare, the person drunk on the street corner, a drug dealer, or even an ISIS soldier. If you approach each and every person with honesty in yourself, about your own crooked journey, with vulnerability, care, and respect, *your* world and life will change for the better. Romans 14:7 says "For none of us lives to himself alone, and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." *Everyone* lives and dies in the Lord. Everyone's journey is important.

And that's it! 😊 God is seeking you, to convince you of these things – who you are in Christ, and your opportunities to interact with the world around you. All you have to do is keep saying yes to healthy sight, and saying yes to the possibility that your dreams will change if you accept God's healing touch.

These things *will* impact who you are in the world, how you live as a Christian in your daily life, and how you live as a Christian when you come to this building – or any building – to worship.

They will impact how you speak *to* yourself, and *about* yourself.

They will impact how you speak to others, and about others.

I hope that we've all learned some of these things in our spiritual journeys. I can't say that I knew them three-ish years ago when I started, but I *know* that *you* have helped me learn them along the way, and I know that my education will be a life-long process.

I am incredibly thankful that I have had this time with you, congregation, and you, Chuck, as mentors. Now, it's one of those times that continuing on the journey simply means needing a new locale to practice some of these things in a new context. Even though I'll be around to say it a lot more, I wanted to take this opportunity to say *thank you*. You all are *wonderful*, and I'm going to miss you!

And when Christ asks you, "What do you want me to do for you?," I hope that you, as well as me, will continue to courageously answer – "Let me see again! Let me have healthy sight." I hope that you keep saying yes to your dreams changing – to seeing, and then following Christ on the way. Amen.

#### **Powerpoint Summary Slides:**

My goals as a minister, as a pastor, as a person attempting to follow Christ on the way, are:

**I. To help you discover who you are in Christ, *and***

**II. To help you find loving, courageous, healing ways to interact with the world.**

#### **I. To help you discover who you are in Christ**

When you have healthy sight, you *know*, without a doubt, that:

- **you are loved and enough just as you are** (Rom. 8:38-39);
- **you are powerful, you are creative, and you are resourceful** (Lk 12:22-23);
- ***your* journey is important.**

#### **II. To help you find loving, courageous, healing ways to interact with the world**

When you have healthy sight, you *know*, without a doubt, that:

- **you will not be less powerful if you *listen* instead of *push*.**
- **you will be happiest, most purposeful if you believe that the other person's journey is just as important as yours** (Rom. 14:7-8).