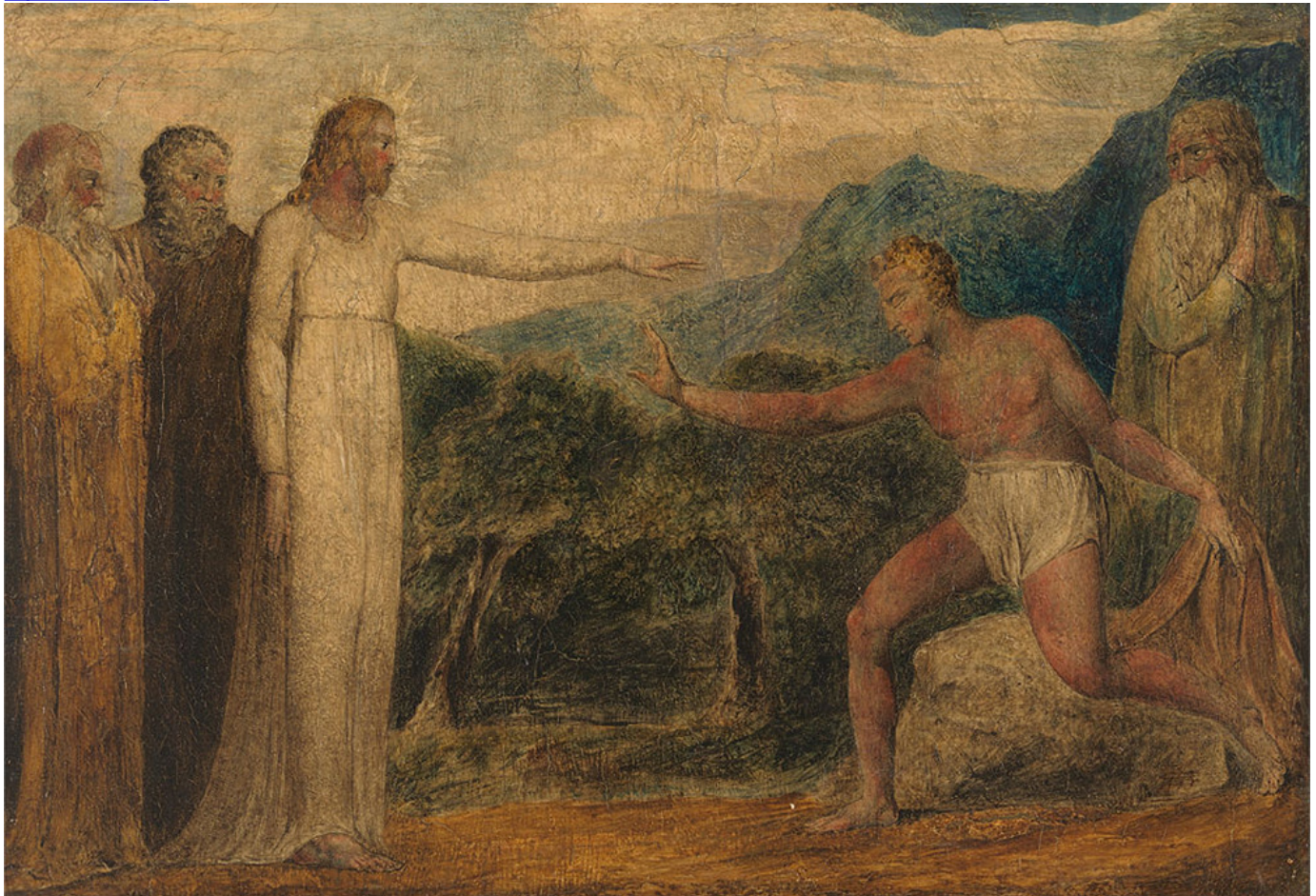


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"Christ Giving Sight to Bartimaeus," by William Blake, a painting created between 1799 and 1800 (Wikimedia Commons/Yale Center for British Art)



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October 26, 2024

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What would it be like to be blind from birth? Sight offers one way of understanding the world, blindness another. The disparity is inexplicable.

We have multiple accounts of Jesus healing the blind. It was one of his specialties and a sign that he was "the one to come" ([Luke 7:18-23](#)). As [John 9](#) underlines, miracles were not primarily a show of power, but a teaching metaphor.

Bartimaeus was both blind and a beggar. That means he probably pestered passersby without knowing who they were. How could he discern the difference between a poor widow and a tax collector? Like some we see in our cities, he must have been willing to implore anyone within hearing range.

Now come Mark's symbolic details. Bartimaeus "heard" that Jesus was nearby. Hearing is a first step in faith — and Bart must have heard of Jesus before that day. Hearing can lead to curiosity. One wonders, "Can this be true?" How might we know? That curiosity and Bartimaeus' need gave him the chutzpah to make a scene in spite of those who preferred to ignore him. This guy would not be silenced, he had too much at stake: *"Son of David! Have mercy on me!"*

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[October 27, 2024](#)

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Psalm 126

Hebrews 5:1-6

Mark 10:46-52

Bartimaeus' racket became impossible to ignore so Jesus told the disciples to call him. They didn't need to speak twice. Bartimaeus leapt up. Navigating with nothing more than his ears, he found Jesus. Jesus saw him and asked what he desired.

Duh!

"Master, I want to see!"

This statement moves us into the heart of the matter. What did Bartimaeus really want to see? How could he have known? He had heard of Jesus and received his invitation. He asks for something else he has heard about but can't imagine. Then Jesus tells him he already has it: "Your faith has saved you."

Duh? What did that mean?

What did Bartimaeus have? "Faith." How did Jesus know? He called Jesus "Son of David." Peter had recently called Jesus the Messiah although he couldn't accept what Jesus said about a suffering Messiah. Bartimaeus named Jesus "Son of David." He called on Jesus as the kingly leader who had united the people and brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus asked Jesus for "mercy." Mercy, *e/leo* in Greek, goes beyond compassion or pity. One who has mercy takes on the need of the other. In Gospel terms, Bartimaeus asked Jesus to be and act like who he was, the Son of God identified with humanity. We echo Bartimaeus each time we humbly repeat his words, "*Kyrie elison*, Lord have mercy, help us to see."

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Although he had just seen Jesus for the first time, Bartimaeus exhibited more faith than Peter and other disciples. Bartimaeus had paid attention to what he had heard about Jesus and allowed it to awaken his curiosity. At Jesus' invitation, Bartimaeus left his belongings behind and went to Jesus saying, "Master, I want to see."

Bartimaeus' story completes a section of Mark's Gospel ([Mark 8:22-10:52](#)). This unit began with the semi-successful healing of a blind man followed by Jesus' three predictions of the Passion — an idea the disciples did not want to comprehend. The section ends with Bartimaeus' symbolic request to see more than he might be able to fathom. He wanted to transcend his limited perspective. Mark put these incidents together to teach taking on Christ's viewpoint is a long process that may need more than one start.

Unlike the disciples who clung to their definition of Messiah, Bartimaeus allowed Jesus to explain and carry out his mission. Bartimaeus expressed the kind of faith lacking in James and John who looked for glory ([Mark 10:32-41](#)). He believed enough to ask for help and was humble enough to go wherever Jesus was going — without

knowing what it would entail. With no bragging, no agenda, no fear, Bartimaeus wanted Jesus to lead him. He was ready to begin to see Jesus' way of seeing the world, a way many chose to ignore ([John 9:40-41](#)).

Mark presents Bartimaeus as a mature disciple. If Bartimaeus were here, he might beg us to listen deeply for the good news in our fragmented world. He would probably tell us that we really do need to hear and respect viewpoints different from our own.

He would urge us to realize and accept that we are blind to more than we see. He would remind us that recognizing and adjusting to Christ's perspective is no once-for-all process ([Mark 8:22-25](#)). If Bartimaeus were here, he might beg us to listen deeply for the good news in our fragmented world. Finally, he would say he knows for sure that admitting our blindness and asking for mercy will open us to what Christ has desired to give us all along.

Master, we want to see!

Today is the feast day of San Martín de Porres of Peru, the illegitimate child of Anna Valezquez, a formerly enslaved Afro-Panamanian woman, and a Spanish nobleman who abandoned the family after Martín's younger sister was born. [Martín](#) is the first person of African descent from the Americas to be declared a saint.

While Martín is said to have had miraculous powers of bilocation, the ability to commune with animals and to heal, service was his specialty. Once, he encountered a sore-ridden beggar and brought him to his own bed in the monastery. When the superior reprimanded him for allowing a dirty, contagious stranger into the cloister, Martín replied that he could easily wash sheets, but not the guilt of ignoring the poor. Disregarding the difference between his rank as a brother and that of his superior, Martín replied, "Compassion, dear brother, is preferable to cleanliness." Martín might be a good interpreter of today's Liturgy of the Word.

A version of this story appeared in the **Oct 11-24, 2024** print issue under the headline: What does it mean to see?.