

Today is known as Reformation Sunday. The beginning of the Protestant Reformation is considered to be October 31, 1521, when Martin Luther first published his writings against the abuses of the Catholic Church. Just before publication, Luther stood before the Diet of Worms, Germany, in front of the ambassador from Pope Leo X's court, Cardinal Cajetan, and before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V.

Martin Luther was defending himself and his writings, especially the 95 Theses he nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral 4 years earlier. The 95 Theses, among other excesses of the Catholic Church, denounced the sale of indulgences by the Catholic Church, some to help pay for the construction costs of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and some to line the pockets of greedy church leaders who were offering salvation to the people for a price. Luther's primary stance was that *the word of God is sufficient for us* and that word can only be found in the Scriptures. It is not found in church hierarchy.

Nearly 500 years ago, the monk named Martin Luther stands in a large hall so crowded with onlookers that scarcely anyone, but the emperor has a place to sit. Although Luther has sympathizers in the throng, he is essentially *alone*, for only he can answer the questions asked this day because they concern only him and if he is willing to repudiate his books and writings.

The observers wait, breathless with anticipation. I can't imagine being under the intense scrutiny of leaders of the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Emperor. Does Luther buckle under the pressure? Does he risk being burned at the stake, as reformer John Hus did a century earlier, or will Luther agree to a compromise? Luther demands to be shown his theological errors from Scripture.

### **His accusers cannot do so!**

Luther received a 24-hour delay to reflect on his answer. He sums up his position in just a few sentences. The first printed accounts quote him as saying, *“Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils because they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. **Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.**”*

Let us now turn to the word of God. In our Gospel reading for today we hear about someone who also takes a stand, a stand which the crowds did not like.

Listen for God's word from **Mark 10:46-52.**

### **This is the Word of the Lord.**

Jericho is a town about 15 miles from Jerusalem. It's on the main north/south road to Jerusalem. Jesus is heading to his last Passover. He's just passing through the town. If one couldn't go to Jerusalem for the Passover, then

you became part of the throngs who crowded the main road to extend blessings upon those who were on the pilgrimage. There were always big crowds of people who traveled to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover. Jesus, his disciples and others are on the main road.

More people are present than one usually encountered in Jericho. It's a good place to be a beggar, along this busy road. One might not even notice a beggar on the roadside amongst this crowd, **but Bartimaeus, blind Bartimaeus**, can sense something's happening -- someone is coming -- the crowds seem anxious -- They say it is Jesus.

**Blind Bartimaeus can picture Jesus, but who notices Bartimaeus?** We have difficulty seeing the beggars in our society. They intrude into our civility. We may cross the street, refuse to pass alongside them. They force us to wonder about our conscience, about our compassion for others. Multitudes in our world walk by "*the beggars*" in our time. We don't pay attention! We miss or dis-miss them.

I was a member of a Lions Club in Illinois. In their national magazine a few years ago was a short article about a person who taught blind children how to take photographs. Surprising! How do you teach a blind person to see, to have vision like you and I might have? Seems like a daunting task. We know that blind people, or for that matter, anyone who has lost one of their five senses, the remaining senses work on a greater skill level than before their loss.

We've know about blind people who play music or sing beautifully; we've seen some play golf, climb mountains, do all kinds of amazing things that even those with sight might find hard to do.

If we close our eyes we visualize images, pictures in our mind's eye. We see before we really can see. Gary Scott, a longtime photographer and blind in one eye, came up with the idea of teaching photography to blind children. Last summer, he started a six-week, hands-on photography class that gives blind and visually impaired students a chance to create photographic art by using their "mind's eye." Scott tells the student what it is in front of them, but the student creates or interprets the picture from their unique perspective. "They take the shot." He says, "We're extracting visuals from their limited or nonvisual world. They have visuals in their minds, but they just don't know how to express them."

On my way to Arizona for a new pastorate call a few years ago, I stopped by Carlsbad Caverns in New Mexico. It is well worth the extra time to get there and see a whole new world underground. On the tour the guide brought the group to a place where we sat down on a low wall. They turned off all the artificial lighting in that part of the cave.

**It was totally black! Dark as can be!**

**It was eerie, weird and a perfect setting for Halloween.**

I wondered, do I really see darkness or is the darkness something I can't see

but I know it's there. The guide asked the tour group to hold up their hand in front of their eyes. He asks us, can you see your hand? Surprisingly, all of us answered "Yes!" But it was total darkness and there, clear as can be, I saw my hand. That's because we have an image in our mind of what it will look like. It's the strangest thing to see, or imagine we've seen in total darkness. I would not have believed it until I experienced it.

Bartimaeus has lived in total darkness, yet he had a visual in his mind too. He pictured Jesus helping him to see again. Bartimaeus wants help and he believes Jesus is the one who can help him. He has blind faith! He won't be ignored. He shouts out loud. He causes such a stir that many in the crowd rebuke him, shushing Bartimaeus to be quiet, hold your tongue, (the Greek translation is literally "shut your mouth").

Beggars and others on the fringes of society intrude into our lives. Sometimes they yell. Sometimes, as has had happen here, we give them food, but they don't like it or appreciate it and demand something else. Sometimes, it is too much for us to see their pain, hear their cries. They are so close we can reach out and touch them. And yet, there are plenty along the sidelines telling them to be quiet, keep it down. In life there are always those who counter argue, "Don't do that – Do this – Don't go there -- Go here — Don't go that way – Go this way – Here, follow me."

But Bartimaeus doesn't give up this chance to get out of darkness; to find relief from loneliness. He wants Jesus to help him. He wants Jesus to give him mercy. He wants to see but he's blind. Everything is black to Bartimaeus. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

And Jesus stops! He stood still! He stops his journey to Jerusalem for this blind beggar crying out to him. Jesus takes a stand. He tells the others, call him over to me. The crowds change how they see Bartimaeus. "Take heart, get up, he's calling you." Bartimaeus nearly leaps out of his garments, throwing his cloak aside to come before Jesus. Then, it's Bartimaeus who **takes his stand, in front of the crowds and** in front of Jesus, showing his faith in Christ. He came to Jesus. He stood before him. Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

**Jesus questions us too.** Do you have something you want Jesus to do for you? Do you want understanding, healing or strength to overcome fear or loneliness.

**I believe there's something we all want from Jesus:**

**we all want mercy –**

**we all want love –**

**we all want God to be with us –**

**we all want God to know our sufferings –**

**we all want God to know our deepest longings and feelings.**

Bartimaeus responds to Jesus, **“Let me see again.”** In other words, “Give me understanding.” Far from refusing to deal with someone hurting, Jesus responds to the shouts and cries and hopes of a man in need. “Go your way, your **faith has healed you.**” But Bartimaeus follows Jesus.

Sooner or later, we all must **throw off our past, stand up, cry out and ask Jesus to let us see. Give us Faith!** Even the blind faith of Bartimaeus could see that, in Jesus, there was the Son of God who could help him. And then we follow Jesus wherever the journey takes us. We’re challenged by this story, to see the need and make a space for those troubled, in pain, a place to speak out so that they may see again. We are challenged to offer hope to those in darkness.

Faith is for the blind because we don’t see everything God can do. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” [Hebrews 11:1]. May we follow you, Lord Jesus, even when all we have is blind faith. Amen.