

Courage to See  
Proper 25, B  
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The Rev. Katherine Bush

“Take heart. Get up. He is calling you.” Take heart, cheer up, don’t be afraid, courage! The crowd in today’s story pivots quickly from telling this man to hush up and stay back to encouraging him to get up, step up, come on, man. This language around *take heart* is some of my favorite wording in scripture. “Fear not” or “don’t be afraid” is one of the most often repeated instructions from Genesis to Revelation; that comforts me in a way as it reminds me that my fearfulness is not unique or unexpected. This idea of *taking-heart* tries, as best it can, to state that admonition in a positive frame. Be brave, take heart, be of good courage. It’s also not a far cry from a line we hear often around here, “lift up your hearts.”

And what courage is needed today? For Bartimaeus, the courage to ask - to ask for what he needs. After a lifetime of being told to stay hidden, to be quiet, to avoid crowds and basically any and all human interaction, Bartimaeus is shouting out for help and for mercy. In as many ways, he is asking not just to see again but to be seen, to come out from the shadows. It’s hard for me to think of anything braver. It’s an extraordinary act of taking heart, of courage [coeur in French means heart] to ask for sight. And he does, “my teacher, let me see again.” And Jesus answers him. And Bartimaeus can see: his cloak crumpled by the road, and the road, and the walls of Jericho, and the crowd there is now full of faces - not just noise. And he is seen for the first time in a long time, perhaps, as a human, as worthy, as a faithful follower.

Do you notice that Bartimaeus and Jesus both really see each other - in a way that the crowd and the disciples and everyone else cannot? Jesus sees Bartimaeus as a person of worth - worth his attention, worth his care, worth his time. And Bartimaeus sees Jesus as the Son of David, a healer, a teacher. And then, once Bartimaeus can \*see,\* he recognizes something even more in this figure in front of him. It’s as if when he regains his sight, he gains an imaginative vision. He can see things that are possible, things that could be, who he himself could become, who Jesus could be, perhaps even beyond an itinerant, miracle-working preacher.

So, there are layers to Bartimaeus’ prayer, and courage infuses all of them. I wonder if you and I are brave like Bartimaeus? What kind of courage do you and I have - to pray, to ask for what we need, and more than that? Now, I’ve worn glasses since the fifth grade, and I sleep in contacts so that I can read the bedside clock in the middle of the night, and recently I’ve added some “gentle readers” to my daily accessories. “My teacher, let me see

again” is a prayer I can say with Bartimaeus but this prayer, for me, doesn’t require that much boldness. I don’t need to face any real fears to ask for a stronger prescription.

But ...

What about the idea that just saying those words is asking for more than Lasik. “My teacher, let me see again.” When we pray for healing, we are really asking for Christ to look our way, and to see us - completely, and to change us in a way that might change who each of us is, and not just on the surface. Healing, becoming more whole will change who I am to myself and who I am to others. Am I ready for that? To pray for healing of any kind is to ask God to take a good, close look at all the messy insides, our broken parts, to see the places that we keep hidden and that others tell us to hush up about. And should those places be mended, we would certainly have to reimagine ourselves and our lives with others. Asking to be seen, to be seen without filters, that’s a prayer that takes some mettle, some chutzpah, some bravery. All the more so, when others are sternly ordering us to be quiet - as so many do all the time. Could we, like Bartimaeus, cry out over the admonishments, cry out even more loudly, more boldly? “My teacher, let me see again.” I’m broken, but I’m worthy. Heal me, repair, mend, strengthen me. See me.

While we are taking heart, let’s keep going. Just for a minute, just to see what it feels like, a little trial run here in the safety of the pews. Can we be even more courageous? “My teacher, let me see again.” And not just again in the old ways, like before the fifth-grade chalkboard got fuzzy, but let me see - let me really see the world. Let me see the world I live in as it is. Deep breath. Give me courage. Let me see the broken bits inside and outside that I don’t even know I need to pray for; the places that need healing and mending that I haven’t even acknowledged to myself. Could we pray to see what we really need to pray about? Deep breath. We can do this. Let me see what I’ve shaded my own eyes from seeing: my privilege, how I ride on currents of power in the direction I want to go and am not flailing against the tide or battering at closed doors just to keep up. Deep breath. Take heart. Let me see beauty where I’m unaccustomed to looking, let me see beauty in the murkiness of daily life, in Covid, in ... Let us see beauty on the roadside, in the crowd, even in the crowd that wants to shut us up or shut us down. Deep breath. This is the big time. Could we see what’s not even there yet? Give each of us strength and courage, strength to imagine what is possible, courage to see what could be - in my life, in this church, in that relationship, in that person, in our homes, in this city. Deep breath.

“Take heart. Get up. He is calling you.” Take heart. Take another look at the one standing in front of us, offering us eyesight and insight. “My teacher, let me see again.” Can you and I see where Christ might heal each of us, and can we see the way that God might lead you and me, and how beautiful the way might be if we just opened our eyes?