**Jesus and his disciples 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!” …**

A man shouts out toward Jesus and the disciples, as he has shouted out, I suspect, many times in the past for money. I imagine this man is no stranger to the spot he has chosen to sit and beg for help. He cannot see, but he can speak. No one initially listens to the blind man. The crowd knows he is blind and they now know he can hear and speak, yet, no one pays attention. Even Jesus walks by the man.

**Have you guessed what town the blind man lives in?** The town is our town. The street the blind man begs from may say Jericho, but the same man begs in our streets every day of the year. We, too, just like Jesus, walk by homeless people with our eyes turned away. Maybe by turning our eyes away we will not feel or see the hopeless despair in the eyes of those who beg. Yet, if we are truthful with ourselves, we may have carried the same weight of hopelessness in our hearts during different seasons of our own lives.

When was the last time you called out for help, and no one heard you? When was the last time you turned your head away from a homeless person begging for money? For me to recall the many times I have not listened to a homeless person is painful for me to admit; I feel a guilt that is not easily discarded when I have money to share. I have walked by the homeless in The Dalles with my head turned away, leaving the beggars with no surprise on their faces. **I have not surprised them with generosity.** I have helped to harden their hearts with apathy.

There are times when we need to help others. And there are times when we need help ourselves. Both require us to listen with our hearts and minds to the people around us. Christianity is not a private club for the privileged, at least, I hope our religion has not become privatized. As your pastor I called out for help this past week when I encouraged us to start meeting in church again. I did this because I heard the cry of loneliness, and I knew that at the heart of St. Paul’s members, is a heart of love.

**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.”**

**Welcome to a holy call**; a plea for healing and hope. Jesus finally hears. Jesus calls the blind man to come toward him. I wonder what changed the mind of Jesus to help this blind man. Was it the loud voice of the blind man as he shouts over and over again, “Have mercy on me?” Or was it the words that the blind man said, “Son of David, have mercy on me?” The author of Mark wants us to know that the words yelled out by the blind man are important. The words tell a story not yet expressed by Jesus; that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus has his own calling, and this blind man recognizes that Jesus is greater than Abraham. Greater than Moses. Greater than the Greek philosophers. Jesus has a mission to show a different face to God and that mission involves helping the downtrodden, the people who do not have hope, the people who appear uneducated, yet, it is Bartimaeus who recognizes God.

The disciples have not quite come to the conclusion that Jesus is God. And the truth is, later when Jesus is tortured, they turn away from the man they followed. Why? They had no idea they were standing in the midst of God, but Bartimaeus yells this piece of news at the top of his lungs from the street he begs from, “Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Street life is harsh, dangerous, extremely hot or cold, and often houses the people least able to care for themselves, the mentally ill, the disabled, the people who cannot or will not care for themselves. Bartimaeus is just one man among many who need help. What about us? What do we know about street life?

…..Street life is not a church. It is not dominated by graceful architecture or poetic prayers or soaring music.

…..Street life is not a safe house where people are protected against those who wish us harm.

…..Street life is not our home. Or is it? If we our honest with ourselves, the street is our home. We live on a street with an address. The street the homeless lay their heads on may not be where we rest our heads at night, but as taxpayers we know what our streets look like. We are not blind like Bartimaeus, we see the homeless clearly. We see the mentally ill striving to cope with a system that continually lets them down. The street is calling us to help.

**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.”**

**Welcome to a place of hope.** The disciples have been present many times when Jesus has healed people, so they say to Bartimaeus with confidence, “Take heart,” this is your lucky day. Jesus is calling you. And Bartimaeus does not hesitate when Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He quickly says, “My teacher, let me see again.”

What a remarkable moment. This is a moment in the life of Bartimaeus that he has been waiting for his entire life. He now stands before Jesus and Jesus simply tells Bartimaeus, “Go, your faith has made you well.”

The first thing that comes to my mind is hearing from Jesus that God has faith in us. Bartimaeus’ sight was restored because of the faith he carried within himself. This is a reminder of God’s trust in us … this is the God within us. I believe this is our nature: I believe this is what Scripture is describing when the Holy Book says we are created in the image of God. Trust the goodness of God that enfolds you! Do not believe you are evil by nature…that you are depraved. Those sins that you have committed and need confession do not describe your nature. Jesus knew that about us. He trusted us to have within us the knowledge and the will to believe in the mighty presence of God, who tells us we are made in God’s image. Bartimaeus trusted in the words of Jesus, but even more powerful is the trust he had in himself.

If I am correct, Jesus Christ was waging war against all those structures of law and tradition that confine you to a view of yourself and others that at best is meager and at worst is evil. Structures that limit your confidence in yourself ... structures that say you are dependent on their authority in order to be in communion with God, structures that claim a primacy of loyalty over your ability to discern and decide what God would have you be and do. Finding hope simply means to trust God, trust yourself, trust the wisdom within you and others, and trust your ability to respond appropriately to the needs of our church …. our streets, our life.

What town do you live in as you ponder the life of Bartimaeus? I live in The Dalles, Oregon where each of us are responsible to show God’s presence in our small town. What is God’s holy call for us? We are to listen and to act with a heart of compassion. Where does our hope lie? Our hope lies within God and within ourselves. Trust God. Trust yourself to act with compassion. Amen.