

PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
REFORMATION SUNDAY
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
October 25, 2009
“GOOD NEWS ABOUT FAITH”
Mark 10:46-52
11:00 A.M. SERVICE

We all are inspired when an individual overcomes great odds and accomplishes extraordinary things. Some of you may remember the story of Erik Weihenmayer. On May 24, 2001, Erik made history as the first blind man to ever climb the world's tallest mountain, Mt. Everest. Erik, who has been blind since age 13, is an accomplished athlete. His blindness has never held him back from a challenge, even one as dangerous as the Mt. Everest expedition. According to his wife, Ellie, Erik's biggest obstacles are the little things in life. For instance, Erik and Ellie have a baby daughter named Emma. Emma has made life a little more complicated for Erik, because she leaves her toys all over the floor. For the man who climbed Mt. Everest, it is a challenge to walk through his living room without tripping on a toy. (1) Some of you young parents can relate to that, sighted or not.

Stories of extraordinary accomplishment are almost always stories of faith. To accomplish anything worthwhile in life, we need faith in ourselves and our own abilities, faith in others and faith in God.

Faith makes a difference in life. And that is good news! Faith is important to us socially, intellectually, financially, physically, and spiritually. I say spiritually, because there are people who have their names on church rolls who do not have faith. Jesus said that if you have faith you can move mountains. Not a lot of faith, just the faith a size of a mustard seed will do (Luke 17:6). Faith can change your life. Our text today is the witness of a blind man whose life was changed.

Bartimaeus was a resident of Jericho and he made his living the same way almost all blind people in that dreadful time made their living, begging. Nothing

else was open to him. So, there he sat by the roadside asking for alms. One day a large crowd of people came down the road toward him. He couldn't see them, of course, but he could hear them, and it was evident there was a purpose behind their journey. They were following a well-known teacher, a Jesus of Nazareth. Bartimaeus had heard that this Jesus had extraordinary power, so when Bartimaeus heard that it was Jesus passing by, he began to shout, ***“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”***

This made his friends uncomfortable. Bartimaeus was making a scene. Some said he was making a fool out of himself, but he wouldn't be quiet. He shouted all the more, ***“Son of David, have mercy on me!”***

Then something quite remarkable happened. It shocked Bartimaeus' friends. Jesus stopped and said, ***“Call him.”*** So those with Jesus called to Bartimaeus, ***“Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.”***

Mark tells us that ***“throwing his cloak aside, [Bartimaeus] jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.”*** No hesitation. No embarrassment. Just unbridled enthusiasm and faith!

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

Bartimaeus said, ***“Rabbi, I want to see.”*** The bible says, “You have not for you ask not.” Listen now to Jesus' answer to Bartimaeus' request. ***“Go, your faith has healed you.”*** Immediately Bartimaeus received his sight, and Mark says, ***“He followed Jesus along the road.”***

Jesus said, ***“Your faith has healed you.”*** Bartimaeus could see because of his faith. Through faith powerful things can happen. Faith can move mountains.

Faith caused Bartimaeus to seek Jesus' help in the first place. The problem of many disadvantaged people is that they have no hope. How many times on the news--when they are giving the unemployment statistics--have you heard them say, ***“This does not include the large number of those who have given up looking for work.”*** It's a terrible thing--to give up.

Bartimaeus could have easily done that--give up. Nobody would have blamed him. He could have accepted his fate as a non-seeing person in a society unequipped to help him overcome his disabilities. He could have thrown up his hands and said, **“Everything’s against me.”** He could have gone into a shell and let his circumstances overwhelm him, but he did not. Many people with far more blessings than Bartimaeus have given up.

Ian Fleming was the author of the James Bond novels, which, of course, have been made into a series of hugely successful movies. Fleming became fabulously wealthy. Yet shortly before his death, Ian Fleming said, **“I’m now . . . ashes, just ashes. You have no idea how bored one gets with the whole silly business of life.”**

Ernest Hemingway was another famous and wealthy writer who came to the end of his life in despair. He said, **“I feel like a burned-out tube in a radio.”** He took a gun and shot himself in the head.

Many psychologists and psychiatrists are now saying that the higher a civilization is, the higher the suicide rate will be. The suicide rate is very high in the U.S. People who kill themselves see no way out--they come to believe that there is no reason to live. Helen Keller, who, like Bartimaeus was blind in her eyes, but not in her soul, put it like this: their **“eyes are full of light but [they] see nothing . . . Their soul’s voyage through this enchanted world is a barren waste.”** (2) How sad to see people with every advantage whose journey is a barren waste. How sad to see people who have given up.

Bartimaeus heard that a man was passing by who could possibly help him and he quite literally leaped at the opportunity. I hope that whatever your situation is today, you aren’t among those who have given up. Giving up is the antithesis of faith, and it is self-fulfilling. It was faith that caused Bartimaeus to seek help.

And it was faith that caused Bartimaeus to speak up. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, Bartimaeus began to shout, **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”** His friends were embarrassed by his behavior. Nice people don’t make scenes, you know. Well, a lot of nice people end up spending their lives beside the road begging.

There is much truth in that little verse in James (4:2) that says, ***“You have not because you ask not.”*** It was faith that caused Bartimaeus to seek Jesus and it was faith that caused him to speak up and ask for help.

It was also faith that caused Bartimaeus to come to Jesus. He was a believer, not a cynic. Many people heard about Jesus and did not respond to him, but Bartimaeus believed that he was who he said he was. And it’s always risky--being a believer. Such people always run the risk of being deceived by false messiahs. As believers we are open to the possibility that there is more to life than what they can see and hear. Many people today are settling for sterile lives, lives with no real power because they have limited themselves to what they can touch and what they can see.

It was faith that caused Bartimaeus to seek help. It was faith that caused him to speak up and it was faith that caused him to come to Jesus.

And it was faith that healed Bartimaeus’ eyes. So-called faith healers have given faith a bad name. They have preyed on the innocent and used the possibility of healing to line their own pockets. That does not change the fact that there is healing in faith.

The eminent Swiss physician and author Dr. Paul Tournier in his book, *A Doctor’s Case Book*, gave many examples from his own experience of people who were healed by the power of faith. In one instance he told of a girl whom one of his friends had been treating for several months without much success for anemia. As a last resort his colleague sent her to the medical officer of the district in which she worked in order to get his permission to send her to a sanatorium. A week later the patient brought word back from the medical officer. He had granted the permit, but he added: **“On analyzing the blood, however, I do not arrive at anything like the same figures as those you quote.”**

Tournier’s friend, somewhat put out, at once took a fresh sample of the blood, and rushed to his laboratory. Sure enough, the blood count had suddenly changed. **“If I had not been the kind of person who keeps carefully to laboratory routine,”** his friend said, **“and if I had not previously checked my figures at**

each of my patient's visits, I might have thought that I had made a mistake." He returned to the patient and asked her, **"Has anything out of the ordinary happened in your life since your last visit?"**

"Yes, something has happened," she replied. **"I have suddenly been able to forgive someone against whom I bore a nasty grudge; and all at once I felt as if I could at last say 'Yes' to life!"**

Tournier comments, **"Her mental attitude was changed and the very state of her blood changed along with it. When her mind was cured, her body was also on the way to being cured."** Then Tournier quotes St. Thomas Aquinas: **"Grace flows from the soul to the body."** (3)

No doctor can tell you how much effect the mind has over the body. We know the mind can destructively affect the body. Hospital rooms are filled with people who would not have been there if they had had the proper attitudes and habits. But we do not know how much healing power there is in having a strong faith. Bartimaeus was in the presence of Jesus. That means that the power of faith was strong and immediate. Bartimaeus was healed immediately.

Of course, Bartimaeus didn't have anywhere else to turn. There were no well-trained medical doctors, no laser surgery, no corneal transplants. If Jesus were here physically today, he might not put as much emphasis on healing people as he did then. After all, modern medicine can heal many people. Still, all healing comes from God whether it comes from modern medicine or whether it comes through prayer.

The point is that where we are spiritually can affect our physical bodies. If we have let burdens like stress or resentment or despair overwhelm us, it will be more difficult for the body to do its healing work. If we will work on our faith--trusting God, letting go of anxiety, practicing forgiveness, believing that there is help for us--often that will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Bartimaeus trusted Jesus and he was healed.

Faith caused Bartimaeus to follow Jesus. Many people pray for healing, but after the healing they are no different spiritually than they were before. When the

scales fell off of Bartimaeus's eyes, they also fell off his soul, and he followed Jesus from that day forward.

If it is your desire to be filled with faith that moves mountains, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church

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1. "A Couple of High Climbers" by Carole Bula, *Time*, June 18, 2001, p. 62.
 2. Dr. R. L. Hymers, Jr., http://www.rlhymersjr.com/Online_Sermons/12-02-01AM_TwoPairsOfEyes.html.
 3. Cited by William Barclay, *And He Had Compassion* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1976), pp. 43-44.