

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

**Title: I Want to See...**

**Lesson: Mark 10:46-52**

*<sup>46</sup> Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*

*<sup>48</sup> Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup> Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”*

*So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” <sup>50</sup> Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.*

*<sup>51</sup> “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.*

*The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” <sup>52</sup> “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.*

Each Sunday in October has its own special meaning. The first Sunday was World Communion Sunday. Churches around the world observe this day, where despite racial, gender, and political divisions, we all come to the Lord’s table and affirm that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. On the third Sunday, we celebrate Laity Sunday, a time to show appreciation for the laity—the people who have faithfully served and supported the church for so long. It is a day to reflect on Christ’s teaching about service and to continue our lifelong journey of serving God and others.

Today, on the fourth Sunday of October, we observe Reformation Sunday. This day takes us back to the 16th century and the Protestant Reformation led by Martin Luther. At that time, the church had become corrupt, selling indulgences—certificates that supposedly forgave sins—in exchange for money. People bought these because they trusted the church’s authority. But instead of focusing on God’s love and truth, the church sought wealth and power. Martin Luther challenged this by promoting “Faith Alone,” “Grace Alone,” and “Scripture Alone” in his 95 Theses, sparking a reformation that opened the eyes of the church.

Reformation Sunday is a time for us to ask ourselves: Are we as the church seeing the truth clearly, or are we still blind to it?

On this Reformation Sunday, we read the story of a blind man in Jericho. He had lived a miserable life, sitting by the roadside every day. People saw him as a burden, sometimes mocking him or treating him unjustly. He was physically blind and had never seen Jericho or his own face. His understanding of the world was limited to what he could hear, touch, smell, and taste.

The man was known as Bartimaeus, but this was not really his name. "Bartimaeus" simply means "son of Timaeus." Last week, we read about James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who asked Jesus for special positions of honor in His kingdom. But unlike them, this blind man didn't even have his own name.

I looked into the meaning of the name Timaeus and found something interesting. In Hebrew, it means "defiled" or "unclean," while in Greek, it means "honored" or "valued one." It seems that before meeting Jesus, the blind man's life reflected the Hebrew meaning—he was seen as unclean by society.

Back then, most people worked in farming, fishing, or raising livestock. There were no machines, so people relied heavily on manual labor, especially from healthy men. Families with many strong workers were considered blessed, but those with physical disabilities, like the blind man, had no choice but to beg to survive. Poverty and hardship were unavoidable for them, and to make things worse, society believed that physical disabilities were God's punishment for sin.

People avoided and looked down on the blind man and others like him. His life was filled with misery and hopelessness, surviving only on the rare kindness of strangers. Even information reached him late. But when he finally heard about Jesus healing the sick, for the first time in his life, he had hope.

Unfortunately, by the time he learned about Jesus, it seemed too late—Jesus was already leaving Jericho. Surrounded by a crowd, the blind man sat by the roadside, using every bit of strength he had to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Without a microphone, and with so many people around, it seemed impossible that Jesus would hear his tired, hungry voice. But the man didn't let that stop him. He kept calling out, ignoring the crowd's harsh words telling him to be quiet. This was his only chance for a different life, and he wasn't going to give up.

Eventually, his voice reached Jesus. Jesus stopped, silencing the crowd, and called for the man. The blind man stood up and took steps toward Jesus. Then, Jesus asked him a question: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Friends, do you remember this question? Last week, when James and John asked Jesus for what they wanted, He asked them the same thing: "What do you want me to do for you?" James and John requested positions of honor next to Jesus when He came into His kingdom. They, along with the other disciples and the crowd, were focused on power and prestige.

But the blind man's request was different. He simply wanted to see. He wanted to see the source of life—Jesus Himself. Jesus saw the man's heart, healed him, and sent him on his way. But instead of leaving, the man chose to follow Jesus, because now his life had a new purpose and hope.

So, let me ask you: Who was really blind? The disciples and the crowd, who were close to Jesus but focused on their own advancement? Or Bartimaeus, who cried out for truth and sight from a distance?

Although Bartimaeus' name may have meant "defiled," once he met Jesus and accepted Him as his Savior, he became an "honored" and "valued one," starting a new life as a child of God.

On this Reformation Sunday, I ask you: Are we, as a church, truly seeing the truth? Do we feel anger at injustice and work to correct it with all our strength? Or are we closing our eyes, remaining silent in the face of injustice and wrongdoing?

The Tuesday before last, we had Bishop's Day at Chapel Heights UMC in Eau Claire. It was a special opportunity to meet our new Bishop, Dan Schwerin. During that time, the Bishop shared a story with us, and that story deeply broke my heart. Our Bishop serves both the Northern Illinois Annual Conference and Wisconsin. The story was about a pastor in the Northern Illinois Conference and his family.

I don't know this pastor personally, but I do know that he and his family are people of color, and that he served a church in a small rural town. I don't know much about that pastor or the town, but I know he was a person of color, and the community he served was not welcoming to people who were different from them. This led to bullying and violence against the pastor and his family. I heard that the windows of the parsonage they lived in were broken by rocks thrown from outside.

As the bullying continued, the pastor had a meeting with the SPRC (Staff Parish Relations Committee) of his church, sharing what was happening to him. However, what he heard during that meeting was: "Pastor, bullying is normal."

When I heard this story from the Bishop, my heart ached—not only for the trauma and pain that the pastor and his family were experiencing, but also for the church that couldn't understand, empathize with, or help them. The church didn't even recognize what was wrong and justified the bullying by calling it “normal.”

I don't know the pastor, the church, or the community, but one thing is certain—violence can never be justified under any circumstances, and violence is not normal. Saying that violence is normal is similar to those who justified Bartimaeus' suffering as God's punishment and oppressed him with religious excuses.

I have often heard people say during discussions about these issues: “Pastor, I'm not racist,” “I have Asian friends, Black friends, Hispanic friends,” or “We're good people; we're different from them.”

I know you are not racist. I know you are good people. But 1 Corinthians 12:26-27 says: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

The Bible tells us that our faith should go beyond individual salvation and extend to social salvation, to love for our neighbors, because we are all part of God's body, and we are all God's children.

I pray for healing from the brokenness that still exists in our society, for those who, like Bartimaeus, suffer injustice in the blind spots of society, misunderstood and overlooked by others, receiving no help. I also pray for change in those who, like the disciples and the crowd around Jesus, are near the truth but fail to see what truth, love, and justice truly are, remaining indifferent to the pain of their neighbors and consumed by their own desires. In the name of the Lord, I earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit will touch and open our minds, hearts, and spirits so that we may truly see. Amen.