

Tonight (and October 1), the Outreach Initiative has organized two incredible opportunities for all of us to come together for a “Come and Be Fed” event that will invite us and show us how to connect and engage more with one another. I hope you will be able to attend. Logistics are outlined in the bulletin insert and online. The most important element of our time together will be at the heart of the conversations we will have together. And the story of blind Bartimaeus and Jesus in Mark 10:46-52 helps give us a foundation of where these conversations may go.

Alex began the conversation last week by highlighting elements of the story from the lens of the two main characters, blind Bartimaeus and Jesus. The encounter between them carries significant meaning: from Bartimaeus’ willingness and boldness to call out to Jesus to Jesus’ willingness and boldness to hear the call and stop and show Bartimaeus that he sees him; from a simple question encouraging human voice and human will, the dignity to speak, to cry out to God, to specify what we need, and to exercise faith in God, to a faithful response of discipleship illustrated in a once crouched man now springing up with one hand extended out to Jesus and the other dropping behind a cane and cloak.

These elements of the story beg questions such as ‘Where does the world look for the greatest truth or the highest good?’ ‘What power or leaders does the world revere most?’ And if we do call out to Jesus, son of David, ‘What do we want Jesus to do for us?’ Jesus makes it clear in his encounter with Bartimaeus that He is willing to listen, and when He listens, He is willing to care, and when He cares, He is willing to respond, and when He responds, He is willing to provide. Looking at the story from Jesus’ lens tells us a lot about who He is.

Today, I would like to read the story again. This time though I would like for us to consider the story from a different lens. Rather than Jesus being the one asking the question, “What is it that you want me to do for you?”, what would it mean for you and me to be the one to ask that question to one another? **Read Mark 10:46-52**

The apostle Paul in his writings (we know them as letters to churches) uses the metaphor “body of Christ” to define the Church. And Paul is especially clear in his letter to the church in Ephesus that as we are the body, Christ is the head of the body. Therefore, we, the body of Christ, are to follow Christ, the head of the body. (Ephesians 1:22-23) If Christ taught it through word or example, we are to pay close attention and do the same. Christ is our ultimate example.

To expand on this briefly, Paul defines the body of Christ by referring to all individuals who "heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13), "are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22), are "joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:16).

We, as members of the Body of Christ, are the physical representation of Christ in this world. The Church is the organism through which Christ manifests His life to the world today.

Somewhere along the line of history and church development the train has gotten derailed. I say this because of the number of metaphors we can often hear in defining the church. Maybe you have heard them or maybe you have even thought them yourself. It can happen even to the best of us.

The church as a gas station, where you fill up your spiritual gas tank when you're running low. The church as a movie theater, a place that offers entertainment. The church as a drug store, where you can fill the prescription that will deal with your pain. The church as a big box retailer, the place that offers the best products in a clean and safe environment for you and your family.

Here is the thing. You won't find any of these metaphors in the Bible. All of them are distortions of the church and they have one thing in common—they're all about me. Fill me up! Entertain me! Take away my pain! Give me the programs I am looking for, for me and my family. The Church is not about me! The Church is about Christ!

There is another metaphor, or analogy, for the church. It too is not in the bible persay, but I think it gets a little closer to what Christ intended the church to be. It is the analogy of a disco ball. First look at the structure of the ball: it is made up of hundreds of tiny mirrors, all connected together! Both of those concepts are scriptural pictures of the Body of Christ! I Cor. 3:18 says "But we Christians are like mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord." And the aspect of all these little mirrors being connected brings to mind the verse in Psalms that talks about being knit together. And one more aspect of the disco ball that can remind us of the Body of Christ is in the rest of I Cor. 3:18, "...And as the Spirit of God works within us, we become more and more like Christ!" God empowers us to become more like God by God's own work in us! Each of us reflects a little bit of God! I John 1:3 says: "But we know this, that when we see God, we will become like God..."

Think of how HUGE God is! God is everywhere, and all around us. Far and near. I as one little human being, made in God's image... you as one little human being, made in God's image...

reflect the love and light of God. God's nature, God's heart, God's creativity. You and I are made to reflect the very essence and spirit of God, and each of us in our own unique ways. So now think of that in relation to all the little mirror pieces being joined together on a disco ball! We as the Body of Christ, are, together, reflecting God. This is an illustration of the church to get on board with. Other metaphors of promise include the church as an orchestra or even a sports team. I will say this though about metaphors. None of them fully capture the same meaning and power as Paul's illustration of the church as the "body of Christ" with Christ as the head of the body.

As Christ's body, seeking to manifest Christ's life (God's will and way) to the world today, we are called to faithfully embody the essence of Jesus' question, "What is it that you want me to do for you?" How?

- We are called to have an intimate relationship of trust and faith with one another, such that we can pray for each other and call out to each other in times of need.
- We are called to speak up and share with one another.
- We are called to hear one another and truly listen.
- We are called to stop (even though we have places to go, things to get to).
- We are called to ask this question in truth and care, and not just assume the answer is obvious.
- When asked this question by another, we are called to answer in truth, and not just assume the one asking knows.
- We are called to be representatives of Christ, our Lord and Savior, not be Lord over and Savior for others. We don't have to be the one who can fulfill the requests in order to ask the question. We don't have to only ask the question of others we think can fulfill the request.
- Like Bartimaeus, we are called to spring up, reach out, drop our baggage behind us, and follow Christ.

"What is it that you want me to do for you?" I am here. I am listening. I am willing to do my best to respond in faith and truth. Will you? Come join me tonight in the Fellowship Hall at 5 pm and let's talk some more. If you can't come tonight, plan to be there on October 1. Together, let's be the "body of Christ" following Christ as our head.