

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us; Open our eyes to see you right in front of us. Amen.*

What would get you on your feet? What would you ask Jesus for?  
Jesus is right here, asking us: What do you want me to do for you?

"Jesus, I want you to... "

I want to be able to walk without hurting.

I want to communicate with my wife/husband/children better.

I want to be free of this anger/grief/resentment/despair.

I want you to heal the wound of racism and repair centuries of harm.

What is it? If you know something you would ask Jesus for, I'd love for you to stand up now. You can speak it aloud if you want, or just stand there.

Restoration, healing begins with our asking. Presumably Jesus passed by thousands of people in need of healing and restoration for all kinds of things. He healed the ones who asked. Don't know why, but that's how it seems to work. So what is it you want Jesus to do for you? Speak it, name it, claim it.

And then believe he has come near. There are a thousand ways we experience him here in this thing we do on Sunday mornings. Thousands more outside of here, but here are some things we claim based on what Jesus has told us. We will know him in the hungry, naked, incarcerated, stranger seeking refuge. We know him when his gospel, his good news, is proclaimed. We will know him in the breaking of the bread. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I will be in the midst of them." In the midst of us, my friends, right here! So he's passing by. He's come near. Now's our chance.

And then call out – loudly. Some people will say, "Be quiet about your faith." Bartimaeus said, "I'm not throwing away my shot."

He bellowed, "Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me."

He knew Jesus was the Messiah, the real thing, and he wanted that power. In saying his name, he was claiming relationship with Jesus, opening himself. People tried to hush him because you don't bother the important man. You don't make a fuss. Many of us have been told, or told ourselves, to live with whatever is holding us back from joy and wholeness. Chin up.

Can we dare, like Bartimaeus, to be open to a new story?  
“Jesus! Son of David have mercy on me!”

And Jesus heard him. He stopped. His handlers tried to keep him moving,  
but he said, “No – let him come.” Let the children come. Let the beggars come.  
Let the blind come. Let the rich come. Let the poor come. Let them come.  
Jesus calls him – They say, “Dude, he’s calling you! Get up.”  
What happens next is extraordinary thing. He springs to his feet.  
He doesn’t shamble over; he doesn’t say, “Please help me across the road,  
You know I’m blind...” He leaps to his feet. And he throws off his cloak.

That might sound like a throwaway detail, but that’s the whole thing right there –  
He throws off his cloak.

That cloak is his most prized possession, his only protection from the elements,  
what keeps him warm; maybe even his sleeping bag.  
It’s his identity – as a beggar, everyone knew who he was. Without that cloak,  
who is he? But he is ready for his new story. Security blanket, identity marker.  
Sometimes our illnesses and sorrows and frustrations have become our  
identity markers – stressed and overworking, anyone?  
Are we willing to get up and throw them off, step out? Bartimaeus threw off  
that cloak. Why? Because he knew he wasn’t going to need it anymore!  
He was ready to walk into the new story of transformation. He had faith that a  
new story was coming. Maybe he didn’t know exactly what it would look like,  
But he wasn’t going to need that cloak anymore. He was ready for new life.

What is the new story Christ Church is being invited into?

Like many churches, we are surrounded by the decline of the old story –  
empty pews, budgets stretched to the breaking point, no Sunday School.  
The old story was great, for a time – full churches, full Sunday Schools,  
full endowments and budgets, full-time clergy.  
It was also usually racially segregated, a church of privilege, but it was thriving.  
That is no longer the church many are experiencing.  
We can wring our hands about the cultural shifts that contributed to decline;  
we can grieve the ones who no longer prioritize being in church on Sunday  
mornings; we can lament the seeming lack of interest in what we’re offering.  
But I believe God is calling us into a new story,  
one that is much leaner and more nimble.  
God is always calling us forward, not back.

As God spoke through the prophet Isaiah,

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.*

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*

*I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

God is calling us out of this dry decline into a lush, abundant ministry – but it won't look like the 1960s. It may or may not have pews and organs.

It may have a picnic on the sidewalk instead of a coffee hour.

It will have the Gospel and the eucharist – those are the essentials.

Will we use this building in the same way we do now, for an hour a week?

Or will we find new ways to fill it with people hungry for God, and for food?

If we really want to know what else it will look like,

we have to throw away the cloaks we're clinging to. We have to see the desert.

And we have to see who is sitting on the side of our roads, calling for mercy.

They may have a real clue about what Christ Church is meant to be in the 2020s.

A few weeks ago I mentioned the concept of biomimicry,

looking at how the natural world solves problems to tackle our own.

When I first heard it talked about on a podcast, I had a thrilling sense that

there are gifts for the declining church in this approach.

Part of what sparked that thought was hearing the discipline's founder speak

about how the natural world copes with a burned out or stripped out landscape, the sequence of organisms that come in and cover –

that seems to be the first priority, to cover the bare earth.

And they begin to root, so that the soil is anchored.

Animals follow those first plants and fungi; a breathtaking renewal happens.

In the same way the cells in our bodies react to injury – they stop their normal

functions and rush to the site of the wound – again, covering is the first priority.

Building a scab, which provides an environment for healing.

I don't have the answers, friends, but I believe these are the questions we need

to be asking. God doesn't have us here in a season of prosperity –

maybe that's not where the gifts are, gifts we might offer the wider church.

**Jesus is with us here amidst the decline to show us a new story.**

I want you to claim this story of healing and new life – not only for yourselves,

but for this church, which has been held back too long by old stories.

And how do we claim this new story? We leap to our feet, invite his power

and love into this place, and actively follow Jesus.

If we can trust Jesus like Bartimaeus trusted Jesus – whom he couldn't even see!  
we can follow Jesus like Bartimaeus did and trust he will lead us to where he  
wants us. It may not look like glory – it may look like crucifixion.  
For Bartimaeus joined Jesus' movement in its next-to-last chapter – the next stop  
was Jerusalem, where Jesus would be first lauded and then tried and executed.  
Is that what Bartimaeus signed up for? Is it what we've signed up for?

But look: Bartimaeus was there Easter morning, when God unveiled the new story.  
When God showed the universe what resurrection life looks like,  
what new life looks like, when the incredible love of God covered the wounds  
and healed them from the inside.  
That is the story we proclaim my friends.  
At the heart of our faith is a new story of such power, that it remade the universe.  
We need not only to proclaim it, but to claim it,  
throw away our old stories and say yes to this one.  
What is our 2020s vision? It starts with Jesus.

**Amen.**

### **Mark 10:46-52**

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!"  
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." 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.  
Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?"  
The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."  
Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well."  
Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

