

I See you – 1. Hearing Other Voices

Mark 10:46-52

October 8, 2023

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Last week, much of our staff was out of town for a few days for a leadership conference. It was really inspiring and helpful, with excellent speakers and preachers — and good time together as a staff. But I tell you what: when I got home, I was tired. Long days with the conference, hours traveling, and time away from regular routine and family left me exhausted.

I came home, carrying my suitcase into the house, and before I even sat down, I began tidying up. The boys were already asleep, but I made sure their backpacks were unpacked and ready. I put some dishes in the dishwasher, and closed the curtains. When I finished one simple task, another popped up in its place. Meanwhile my husband and sister were trying to talk to me, asking about my trip. Suddenly, they both got up to leave. My sister was going home, and Luke was getting ready for bed himself.

And that's when I got it... I had been so busy "getting settled" at home, that I forgot to get settled back in the most important way: connecting with my people. I really messed it up. One way I respond to stress and exhaustion is by what my husband calls "stress cleaning." And here I was, so focused on the task, so unaware of myself or my surroundings, that I failed to sit down, to rest, and connect with two of the most important people in my life.

This can be so easy to do, can't it? I could probably rattle off several other examples of times when I missed the chance to connect with others in a real way, because I was so focused on myself. The daily to do list can act as blinders to the world around us if we let it.

This can happen for us at home, and for us as the body of Christ.

I had a colleague whose church had a big field and playground, and during the week, of course, it wasn't used very much. But sometimes some of the neighborhood kids would play outside when they got home from school. Some of the church ladies were concerned - this playground was for "our kids"? What if these neighborhood kids got hurt? What if they ruined the equipment? We didn't know who they were, or what might happen. Maybe we need some rules so "those kids" don't hurt "our" playground?

What was beginning to happen, of course, is that the church was starting to have blinders on - and allowing the work in front of them to distract them from an opportunity to connect. In this case, they were allowing the preservation and care of their playground to take priority over the opportunity to connect with kids from their community.

They needed a shift in their perspective, a nudge to remember to see and hear the people in front of them, remembering that people are *always* more important than things, right?

Do you think when I write my biography or my family looks back on my life they will be happy that I kept a clean house? Or that I kept good relationships and was trustworthy? When my colleagues church looks back on their ministry - do you think they will be most proud of their well maintained fields, or the sounds of kids laughing and playing on the playground?

Fortunately, this church *did* get a shift in perspective, and now not only has a playground filled with neighborhood kids — but after getting to know the kids and their families, learning what they needed: the church now brings snacks, too.

All of us, whether as individuals or any community we are part of, want to leave a lasting impact and legacy in the world. We want to know that our lives were important and mattered. One thing I've noticed over the last 15 years of being a pastor, is that when people reflect back on their life, or remember their loved one at a funeral, or tell stories of their church growing up... it's almost always the small points of connection that are remembered most.

It's the way that Grandma always had time to play with me, setting aside her own tasks to pull out a board game or deck of cards. It's the way that every Sunday as a kid, LeRoy had a smile and piece of gum waiting for me when I arrived at church. Or the way that I knew my Uncle would always give me good advice, without judging me or ratting me out to my Mom. It's the way my college pastor sat with me, and helped me discern which seminary God was guiding me, not by giving me her opinion, but helping me trust my own.

It's the small moments that build up over time that reveal the impact we make on the world. And if we look behind any of these small words or actions, what we'll see is a sense of belonging.

One of the greatest gifts we can give to one another, is a sense of belonging. A safe place to land. A place to be seen, heard, and known deeply.

Today we're beginning a new sermon series called, I see you, and for the few weeks, we will be looking at Biblical stories to help us learn how to listen, respect, affirm and act for *and* with others. Throughout these next weeks, it is my prayer that all of us grow in ways that help us increase a sense of belonging in our congregation and world.

Though none of us are perfect, and none of us are expected to be, *all* of us want to grow in our faith and ability to love one another well. One way we will do that, is by practicing seeing and hearing one another.

In recent years, many studies have shown an increase in anxiety, isolation and loneliness. And this is true of people of every age, across the board. Although, significantly, our teens and young adults, Gen Z, are experiencing higher rates of isolation and mental health concerns than any other generation. And this is particularly alarming because of the critical time in life and brain development for them.

There are many things that contribute and many responses to help one another out of feelings of isolation. But one thing we can offer to people of every age is belonging. And as the church, one of our greatest gifts we have to offer others is a place to belong. A place to be seen, heard, and known deeply.

Have you ever felt alone in a crowded room? As if no one saw you or understood you? Perhaps you felt like their eyes just glossed over you and you weren't really seen.

My Grandma has commented on this, as she aged and struggled with hearing. That life is isolating because the people she knew best have died, because she can't do the things she

used to, and because she can't hear well even when she does. But you know what else happens? People begin to buzz around her, speaking about but not necessarily to her.

I think almost all of us can share a memory or experience of feeling like we don't belong. And, there are some among us, who have experienced it far more acutely than others. Folks who have been meant to feel as if belonging is out of reach, because they are not able-bodied, are too young or too old, because they live in the wrong part of town, or otherwise don't think, look, or act in "right" ways.

Now, I am an educated, able-bodied, English-speaking, employed, married, white woman in the middle decades of my life. There are times where I have felt overlooked or unseen. But generally, the world is very much accessible to me. And feelings of belonging are readily in reach.

What this means for me, is that I need to recognize that I have a particular lens to view the world, that has been shaped by my experiences. But *my* experience is not universal, nor is it the only or "right" way. So, in order to really create an authentic place of belonging, I need to be intentional in how I listen and learn from others.

I remember *being* a teenager, but the world has changed since then. Hardly anyone had a cell phone, and we didn't even *text* back then. Likewise, I can imagine how my Grandma feels - but I've not experienced outliving my friends, and I don't know what it is to be unable to hear.

So for me to be able to really *see* others and create a space of belonging, especially those who have different life experiences or perspectives from me: I've got to listen. Maybe ask some curious questions. But mostly listen, without assumptions, and really begin hearing what those around me, particularly those who find themselves on along the edges, have to say.

Now, considering all of this, let's look to the story of Bartimaeus again, as told in Mark's Gospel. Let me set the scene for you: as we begin, we're told Jesus and his followers are leaving town and are at the city gates.

This is the edge of town, and was a place that not only marked the boundaries of the city, but was a common place where people in need gathered. Just as intersections at our on and off ramps for highways are common place for folks in need to gather, so too did Jesus meet folks at the city gate.

It is here that Bartimaeus sits. This day is just like any other: sitting on the side of the road, he asks for help and relies on the generosity of strangers to meet his needs. Praying that those around him will both *hear* and *see* him.

Scripture tells us his life was hard: he was poor, blind, and unable to work. Each of these created barriers in his life, setting him apart from others, so that he didn't "really" belong. His everyday survival relied on *being seen* by his community and supported by them, as there were no social programs to help meet his hunger or medical needs.

Now, I'm convinced that Jesus always shows up, in the middle of our everyday life. And sometimes our eyes and hearts are open enough to see him. As we're going to work or school, as we're shopping for groceries or cleaning the house. In the midst of our daily life, Jesus appears. And with it, we're invited to both *see* Christ around us, *and* be fully seen by Jesus, our Lord. We are given opportunity for connection and transformation.

Part of creating belonging for one another is being ready and willing to see each other all the time. Not just when it's convenient for me, or on my calendar. But to pay attention, watching and listening for opportunities to make connection.

And that's exactly what happens for Bartimaeus. Chapter 10 of Mark's Gospel says: **"When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!" Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, show me mercy!"**

And Jesus stopped and called him forward. This is a moment of full belonging. Bartimaeus, a man without physical sight, has *seen* Jesus and names him as the Son of God. Few in Mark's Gospel have yet to do this, and so it is significant that this man along edges of life *sees* Jesus for who he is. Even the disciples, who have given up everything to follow him, still struggle to see. But for Bartimaeus, it is clear. *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*

And in turn, Jesus hears and sees Bartimaeus fully. Even though there is a large crowd and we can assume many people and voices rallying for his attention. And even though, Jesus is not "scheduled" to stop at the city gate, but has a long day ahead of travel toward Jerusalem. Even though Jesus has *every reason* to keep walking. He pauses. He turns and gives his full attention to Bartimaeus.

I wonder how many people this day, or days prior, had passed Bartimaeus at the gates without a second glance or thought. And those that did glance his way, how many *really saw* him? How often did people say his name, give him a hug, or ask him what he needs?

But now, Jesus does all of this, when he turns and asks: **"What do you want me to do for you?"**

Wow. These are powerful words. Now some of us, are regularly in positions of authority where we are asked this question. But for Bartimaeus, this is a question that places Christ in service to him. It places Bartimaeus at the center, and lifts up his voice, his needs, his desires above all else. Jesus is ready to listen, and to serve.

Notice Jesus doesn't assume he already knows what Bartimaeus wants. By asking, Jesus enters into a relationship with Bartimaeus. And in doing so, he is creating a sense of belonging, a place with Bartimaeus is seen and heard.

It's the start of community. And can you imagine how this feels? To be one who has been pushed out of the city gates, forced to live on its edges. Where no one asks about what you need, or how you feel. But at best, tosses you a couple dollars as they pass by. And at worst, don't even see you at all.

What do you want me to do for you? "Teacher," the blind man says, "I want to see."

Bartimaeus asks for his vision to be restored, but he's also asking for healing and belonging. Because in the ancient world — if his sight was restored, so too would his ability to rejoin community. And so this miracle of Jesus, is not only about sight — it is about belonging. This, like all of Jesus' ministry is about being seen and known deeply and bringing healing to all of us.

I wonder how many of us might answer the same. *Teacher, help me see.*
Help me see my neighbor. Help me see past the things that divide us.
Help me see the brokenness around me.
Help me to see the ways ableism, racism, sexism, and exclusion
are stitched into the fabric of our world.
Help me see others as you see them. Help me see myself as you see me.
Help me see those who struggle with depression and anxiety.
Help me see the person who is hurting, from generations of trauma
or pain in their relationships.
Help me see the elder who feels alone. And the teen who's just not sure what to do.
Teacher, help me to see. In every way that matters, help me to see.

“Go”, Jesus says, to Bartimaeus and to you, “your faith has healed you.” Being seen and heard *is* healing. It is belonging and hope. Being seen and heard fully will transform your life. And when you pause to see and hear those around you, you can transform theirs.

Now, we don't know the future of Bartimaeus for sure, there are some who believe Bartimaeus became a leader in the early church. That the reason we know his name, while many who are healed by Jesus go nameless, is because his was a story that was well known in the early church and frequently told.

Have you heard the story of Bartimaeus? How Jesus heard him calling, and healed him? Have you heard the story of Bartimaeus, who saw Jesus? Really saw him? Have you heard? Have you seen?

I love imagining what was next for Bartimaeus. That being heard and seen by Jesus transformed his whole life, and set him out on a new course. Isn't this an incredible testimony? On a perfectly normal day, Bartimaeus met Jesus and everything changed.

What do you want me to do for you, asked Jesus. And in hearing the voice of Bartimaeus, Jesus made an impact that stretched far beyond the city gates... but influenced the whole church. I love thinking about the ways that one small moment, one small act, can change the world. But you know what? It's enough to change one life. It is enough to see and hear the person across from you. To them, that's everything.

I invite and encourage you this week, to pay attention to opportunities to see and hear the people around you. Set down your calendar, turn away from the noise of the day: and listen. Look for one opportunity every day to create belonging. Now, I want to close by sharing a poem by Andrew King, I came across this week:

Where have you been today, Bartimaeus?

“I've been in a world of hunger and fear and darkness.

I've been by the side of the road I name despair.

I've been cast off, like something beyond repair.”

What have you heard today, Bartimaeus?

“I've heard the pain of those who cry for justice.

I've heard the pain of those who cry for peace.

I've heard someone is near who brings release.”

What do you need today, Bartimaeus?

“I need to know that joy can rise from ashes.

I need to know that hope can rise from grief.

I need to see the sun touch the lifted leaf.”

What did you do today, Bartimaeus?

“I called to the Son of David who comes to save us.

I called to the One who mercy freely gives.

I called to the One whose power opened my grave.”

Where are you going today, Bartimaeus?

“To be with Christ as he brings new days to others.

To follow the One who’s brought me this new sight.

To share with all God’s people this new life.”

Good and mighty God, you have created us in community with you and desire that all people know true belonging. Help us this week, to see and hear those around us, to make wide the circle and work towards a day where all people know fully what it is to be cherished and belong. *What do you want me to do for you?* asked your son. Beloved Christ, help us to see. Help us to hear. Help us to heal. Help us to love. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of October 8, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Holy One, you have made us one with you and taught us to be one with one another. Be with me, helping me to encounter your presence throughout the day. Make me to embody your love, mercy, and justice and guide me to see others fully as your beloved ones. Amen.

Monday, October 9

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52 (Common English Bible)

Jesus and his followers came into Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, together with his disciples and a sizable crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, Timaeus’ son, was sitting beside the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!” Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, “Son of David, show me mercy!” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him forward.” They called the blind man, “Be encouraged! Get up! He’s calling you.” Throwing his coat to the side, he jumped up and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said, “Teacher, I want to see.” Jesus said, “Go, your faith has healed you.” At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus on the way.

Observation

In the verses immediately before this passage, the disciples are asking Jesus who is “the greatest” among them. Jesus tells them to follow in his example, as one who has come to serve, rather than be served, and to bring liberation and healing for all people. The disciples, with full sight and full access to Jesus, did not fully understand his mission. Now we meet Bartimaeus, who is blind and without regular access to Jesus, who is able to see Jesus fully and understand that Christ is the one who redeems and restores us. While the disciples sought glory, Bartimaeus sought understanding.

Application

Many accounts of Jesus’ healings can be challenging for our modern ears. While the ancient world was quick to cast aside people based on their gender, relationship, economic status, neurodiversity or physical abilities, we live in a time where our differences and diversities can be embraced and celebrated. Our goal, and calling, is to be an inclusive body of Christ, who see and celebrate diversity within rather than making a goal of “sameness.” Unlike the crowd around him, Jesus sees Bartimaeus fully and recognizes his deep faith. Bartimaeus was not “broken” in

his blindness, but like all of us is made whole by our love of Christ. Even without sight, Bartimaeus is able to see Christ fully, identifying him as the Son of David. What Bartimaeus teaches us, is that it is our faith, not our status, that brings us to our whole selves in Christ.

Prayer

Holy Christ, thank you for seeing and knowing me fully. Help me to embrace the others, that together we can experience the fullness of your kingdom. Remind me that I am made wholly perfect by your love. Amen.

Tuesday, October 10

Scripture: Mark 7:24-30 (Common English Bible)

Jesus left that place and went into the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know that he had entered a house, but he couldn't hide. In fact, a woman whose young daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit heard about him right away. She came and fell at his feet. The woman was Greek, Syrophenician by birth. She begged Jesus to throw the demon out of her daughter. He responded, "The children have to be fed first. It isn't right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." But she answered, "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." "Good answer!" he said. "Go on home. The demon has already left your daughter." When she returned to her house, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

Observation

This is a complicated and difficult passage, with lots to unpack. The woman and daughter in our story are Greek immigrants and Gentiles. With bravery, she approaches Jesus and asks for healing. And at first, Jesus dismisses her to instead care for the people of Tyre. The woman is insistent and pleads with Jesus to see her fully and heal her daughter.

Application

I'll admit, I struggle with this passage and hearing Jesus initially overlook the woman's request. But then I wonder, what is Jesus modeling for me? For us? He was busy in his ministry with a long list of goals and objectives. This woman disrupted that, challenging Jesus to accept the interruption and see the need in front of him. When he did? We see healing and restoration.

How often do the tasks and agenda of your day limit the interactions in front of you? Have you missed an opportunity to show love? To experience full community and healing, because it wasn't "scheduled" or written on your to do list? I know I have. Jesus reminds me here that the most important work is always the person in need who is in front of us. Our child in need of a hug is more pressing than laundry. The visit with a neighbor is more important than lawn care. A smile and word of gratitude to a barista is greater than our rush for coffee. When we pause, and redirect our attention, we too will find community and healing. How might Jesus open your eyes and heart today?

Prayer

Jesus, my Christ, be with me today. Open my eyes, hands, and heart to be present to those around me. Disrupt the order of my day, that I might embrace opportunities to love and see those around me more fully. Amen.

Wednesday, October 11

Scripture: Mark 4:21-25 (The Message)

Jesus went on: “Does anyone bring a lamp home and put it under a bucket or beneath the bed? Don’t you put it up on a table or on the mantel? We’re not keeping secrets, we’re telling them; we’re not hiding things, we’re bringing them out into the open. “Are you listening to this? Really listening? “Listen carefully to what I am saying—and be wary of the shrewd advice that tells you how to get ahead in the world on your own. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity. Stinginess impoverishes.”

Observation

This passage is in the middle of several parables, where Jesus is helping us learn how to be a disciple. Here, Jesus reminds us that the story of God’s grace in our lives is something to be shared, as a lamp on a table. We are to be bold in our listening and our living, that all we do is wrapped in the generous love of Christ.

Application

This passage reminds me of a song I learned as a child: *“O be careful little ears what you hear ... for the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful little ears what you hear.”* In this age of information, it reminds me to be cautious in the words and messages we receive. Are we listening to the word of Jesus in our life? Or are we focused on messages that cause us to doubt our worthiness, our abundance, our gifts for the world? God desires that we are transformed by Christ’s love. How might you take time to pause, sit in the presence of God, and reflect on God’s presence in your life today?

Prayer

Good and loving God, open my heart and my senses that I pay attention to your word and guidance. Help me to embrace your Gospel of love, mercy and grace, that it transforms my whole life. Amen.

Thursday, October 12

Scripture: Psalm 116:1-2 (Common English Bible)

I love the Lord because God hears my requests for mercy. I’ll call out to God as long as I live, because God listens closely to me.

Observation

The Psalmist continues, in this chapter, to praise God for being faithful through times of distress and worry. It is because of God’s faithful presence and listening, that the Psalmist feels comforted and confident that they will be okay. “I tell myself, you can be at peace again, because the Lord has been good to you.” (v7)

Application

Throughout this sermon series, we are considering the ways that our listening can help us better respect, affirm, and care for one another. I’m guessing each of us has an example of when we felt valued because God, or others, “really listened” to us. Listening helps us feel seen. I’ll admit, I am not always good at this! Recently, one of my boys said to me, “Mom, stop interrupting me!” And while I hadn’t interrupted their speaking, I realized I was talking over their space to listen deeply and respond. I was so rushed in the conversation, and quick to “listen so I could respond,” that I wasn’t really *hearing* them.

Listening is also a practice. It takes time and intention to do well. How might you practice deep listening today? Try this: be fully present when others are speaking to you. Don't rush to consider your reaction or response, but solely listen. Then pause and reflect before responding. Does this make an impact? How does it feel to practice this same deep listening while in prayer, trusting that God is offering you the same?

Prayer

God who hears, thank you for listening to the longings of my heart, the words of my mouth, and the sighs of my lungs. I trust you to see and understand me fully. Help me to practice this same art of listening, that I give space for others to be fully seen, too. Amen.

Friday, October 13

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-29 (Common English Bible)

"Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed." When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he was teaching them like someone with authority and not like their legal experts.

Observation

This is another passage I was taught as a child through song. Perhaps some of you were, too? *(If you're unfamiliar, or want a reminder, you can listen to it here:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eu5bBDRpzPM>) Jesus teaches us to be wise in building our lives and faith practices – placing them upon solid ground that withstands many treacherous elements. Christ is our firm foundation and is strong enough to hold us throughout every time and circumstance.

Application

I love how easily understood this passage is, and all of us can immediately picture a house on rock or sand, and make a connection to our faith practices. We're not alone, because the passage ends by saying those hearing were "amazed" at Jesus words because he taught them in ways they could understand. Here's my challenge today: when we talk about our faith and impact Jesus has made on our life, can we share in ways that people can easily understand? Can we use simple imagery and words, so that folks who have not grown up attending worship or reading scripture, or folks who have been hurt by the church, can see and understand your story more easily? How might your words and actions about your faith story be shared in a way that is understandable and invitational?

Prayer

God, you are my rock and my redeemer. I give thanks for your faithfulness throughout my life and in every circumstance. Give me wisdom to embody your story of love and share it in such a way that others, through me, can get a glimpse of your redeeming love. Amen.

Saturday, October 14

Scripture: Mark 9:7 (Common English Bible)

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!"

Observation

This single verse is part of the Transfiguration story in Mark. (*Read the whole thing here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+9%3A2-12&version=CEB>*.) It is one of my all-time favorite stories in scripture. It's literally a mountain-top experience, where Peter, James and John see Jesus *transfigured* before them. They have followed him as a disciple, but here they see Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. It's a life changing moment, where they see Christ *fully* for who he is. It not only changes their lives, but their relationships. And it better equips them for everything else ahead.

Application

As we close out this week, I want you to consider: how does being *fully seen* change your life and relationships? The disciples have already shaped their lives by following Jesus. But here, in this transfiguration, they see him dazzling in all his divine glory. There is no going back now; everything has changed. This moment allows their understanding and love to deepen. It doesn't stop doubt, misunderstandings, or conflict from happening in the future, but seeing Christ fully awakens them to new possibilities in their love of God and one another. When have you felt fully seen? How has that changed your relationships?

Prayer

God of creation, you have given me your beloved and dearly loved Son. Help me to listen and to follow. Guide me, that I trust that you love me with that same delight and help me to love others as deeply. Amen.