

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 partner 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 God wants it that way, 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.

"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!

We will know him in the breaking of the bread.

We know him when his gospel, his good news, is proclaimed –

which is what I'm doing right now, what we do when we sing.

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."

We are "quieting" ourselves into oblivion as churches. No, be loud!

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 the most 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.

Frances and Judith MacNutt are giants in the healing ministry. Frances was a
Catholic priest who became filled with a powerful gift of healing; eventually he
met Judith, a psychotherapist, and they fell in love and married and became
Episcopalians! In their ministry they have travelled all over the world leading
healing missions. Hundreds and thousands of people come to be prayed with.
They tell the story of a healing mission in India, hundreds of people there.
And there was this girl in a wheelchair, clutching a brown paper bag.
She'd been in a train accident and her legs had become badly mangled;
one foot was facing the wrong way. When the prayer team got to her they
started to pray, and over the course of an hour or so, that leg began to straighten.

Sometimes you pray for months and see gradual results, but with people with particularly powerful gifts for healing, strong faith, such things happen more quickly.

All over the world, even in this country, healings like this happen.

So her leg turned around the right way, and they invited her to stand.

She was going to need time to build up her muscles, but she could walk.

Then they asked what was in that bag she was holding so tight. It was shoes.

She'd brought shoes. That is faith. That is expecting blessing. She was ready.

Bartimeaus knew God was in the blessing business, and he was ready.

What cloaks are we clinging to? What markers of identity that are no longer ours?

A job that you've been tolerating for too long, that no longer uses your gifts?

A friendship that has grown toxic, dragging you down instead of lifting you up?

Perhaps a grief that you hold onto because it's all you have left of your beloved...

A pattern you've adjusted to that once helped you cope and now just holds you back?

An addiction? In Bartimeaus we see the first steps addicts going into recovery take:

1. We admitted we were powerless over the substance we're addicted to—that our lives had become unmanageable;
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us.

Bartimeaus knew he needed help, and that Jesus could help him. He was ready.

What is it you're ready to throw off, to cross the road into God's glorious future?

Because Bartimeaus wasn't only in it for the healing – he wanted Jesus.

After his sight is restored, what does Bartimeaus do? He follows Jesus!

He became a disciple. He came in right at the end of the story.

Jericho was Jesus' last stop before he got to Jerusalem and faced his passion and death, his execution. And Bartimeaus had a front row seat to all of it.

He saw Jesus adored by crowds, then turned on, and arrested, tried, betrayed, executed, all in the most humiliating, brutal way possible.

And Bartimeaus 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. That is the story we proclaim my friends.

That is the story we proclaimed for Beverly Stone, whom we buried yesterday.

That is the story we will proclaim for Jennifer and Andrew,

whom we will baptize in a few weeks.

Infirmity, pain, even death never have the last word. The last word is Jesus.

And He is here with power and love to heal.

Are you ready to walk forward into transformation, to throw off your cloak,
whatever it is; are you ready to tell Jesus what it is you want him to do for you?
We do need to be able to imagine it, like the little girl with her shoes,
like Bartimaeus without his cloak. He was ready to accept a new story.
In order to really accept healing and freedom and renewal,
we need to be willing to leave our cloaks behind.

I had to walk out of a wonderful story when I accepted God's call to ordained ministry.
I had been wrapped in a wonderful church in New York in which I came to faith,
in which I came to learn that Christianity is not about being a good person,
but about being accepted unconditionally and loved into wholeness
by a God whose love cannot quit;
In which I learned that Jesus was alive, and I could talk with him and hear him.
In which my gifts were named and invited, in which I became a leader.
And at which I spent almost all my time, probably to an unhealthy extent.

People were always saying, "When are you going to seminary? Why aren't you
ordained," and I would say, Oh, God needs leaders in the pews..."
But when I finally gave myself space to dream it, the call came on thick.
And it meant leaving that place, moving to New Haven, leaving friends, losing all
the identity markers of church leadership, learning to be a student again.
I had to throw off that cloak and walk into this new story God had for me,
and in part so I could be here this morning, inviting you to throw off yours.

Are you ready to follow him, to the Cross and beyond, to the empty grave?
Are you ready for walk with him into the fullest life you could imagine?
I need to tell you, you're not going to manage that just sitting here once a week.
You're going to need to put some skin in the game – start studying his Word,
going deeper in a life of prayer, going wider in a life of service.
All of these are invitations we issue regularly – I want to see more of you accept.

Because 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.
God wants us to leap to our feet, invite his power and love into this place,
and actively follow Jesus.
And share this story. Whatever it is that brings you here on a Sunday morning,
whatever it is you get here, someone around you wants that too. Invite them!

We are here because we celebrate a radical new story.
At the heart of our faith is a new story of such power, that it remade the universe.
The One who made all nature overturned the law of death to bring life.
And we dare to believe this power that made all things new lives in us,
 works through us. *Same power that conquered the grave lives in me.*
We need to believe that God is in the business of blessing, and expect blessing.
What that looks like is up to God.
Our call is to believe the new story, claim the new story, luxuriate in the new
 story. And then to speak the new story, so everyone can live it.
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.

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Thus says the LORD:
Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."
See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
 and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together;
 a great company, they shall return here.
With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not
stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.