

**LIGHT IN OUR SPIRITUAL DARKNESS**  
**30th Sunday in OT, October 24, 2021**  
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In 1882, the Soudan Underground Mine near Two Harbors, Minnesota, began its operation of providing iron ore to a growing country. While the mine ceased operation in 1962, it is still open for tours, which my family and I did a few years back. We were advised to bring old clothes and a warm jacket. We were glad that we did... it was damp, muddy and a cool 51-degrees throughout the mine. Shoulder-to-shoulder, we crowded into a small elevator nicknamed the “cage” and we were sternly told to keep our hands inside. We began a slow descent down into the earth watching the wet, rock walls pass by just inches from the metal mesh saving us from being crushed. Down, down, down we went... a half mile underground in the rickety cage with the safety cable clickity-clacking along the way. Our initial descent complete, a small, odd train met us at the elevator... it was used to take miners even farther into the shaft and that’s what we did for another quarter mile.

From here our tour began and we eventually ended up in an enormously large cavern chiseled out by miners over 75 years ago. Our tour guide spoke about the horrendous working conditions, especially the lack of light. While the cavern was currently lit with modern illumination, with the flick of a switch, the guide changed our string of 100-watt bulbs to the single light from an old-fashioned handheld lantern that was augmented only by a somewhat stronger light atop the worker's hard hat. And, he said, when that went out..." And, in an instant, there was total darkness... my boys clung to my legs. I had never experienced darkness like this... there was absolutely no light whatsoever... now I knew what "darkness like death" meant. There was nothing but nothingness... even on a dark night, there are stars... even when you close your eyes, light still penetrates the eyelids. But, here, almost a mile underground... there was nothing. I remembered this mine tour when I read our Gospel today... I thought about the life Bartimaeus... thought about his blindness and the darkness dark-as-death that he lived in every single minute of his life. I imagined how he

lived, wondered how I would fair if I were in the same situation and I came to understand his desperation – and his faith – that St. Mark shares with us today. Let's take a trip with Bartimaeus, walk a while in his sandals.

We don't know how Bartimaeus became blind... if he was born without sight or suffered a later malady resulting in his handicap. We do know he lived near Jericho. As a blind beggar, he would position himself along a busy road where people traveled and where there was the greatest opportunity for a donation. Surely, he would hear people talking about Jesus and would ask the people to stop and tell him the latest news. He would hear about Jesus unstopping the ears of the deaf, how he cast out demons and how he even raised the dead.

Bartimaeus would wonder if Jesus could cure blindness. And, one day he hears just that... a traveler tells him about Jesus restoring sight to a man born blind, a miracle never before accomplished. Bartimaeus began to feel hope in his heart and faith in his soul that *he* could be healed.

Since hearing of this miracle, Bartimaeus would replay the healing miracle over and over in his mind. He would ask people to tell him the story again and again, each time with hope and faith growing. Perhaps this mulling of the miracle went on for weeks or months?

But then, then as foot travel begins to increase in anticipation of Passover, Bartimaeus hears an approaching crowd... not the normal crowd of the day... this was bigger... there is a murmur of voices and an excitement amongst the people that he can sense. He calls out, "What's happening? What's happening." A traveler shouts back, "Jesus is passing by!" The faith of Bartimaeus leaps into action. "Now is the time! This is my opportunity! This may be my only chance!"

He calls out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowd tries to silence him but it makes him shout even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!!"

Jesus stops. "Call him," he says. Bartimaeus flings aside his cloak rushing to the Messiah, arms flaying to reach the savior he cannot see. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks. "Rabbi, let me

recover my sight.” To which Jesus responds, “Your faith has made you well.” Does Bartimaeus run off to see his mother or father? Does he take in the faces surrounding him? Does he let the beauty of nature awe him? No. St. Mark tells us Bartimaeus’ response is to follow Jesus. In thanksgiving, Bartimaeus becomes one of Jesus’ followers. There was no stammering or him-hawing... Bartimaeus knew what he needed from Jesus: “Lord, I want to see!”

Jesus came to heal the spiritually blind yet many are content to remain in darkness instead of coming into the light of the world. Bartimaeus did not have the religious opportunities that we have, did not have the encouragements or invitations we receive, did not have multiple chances to call upon Jesus as we do... yet... he did not waste the single opportunity that he received. How many times have you heard the Gospel message? How many times have you heard Christ calling to you? How many times have you surrendered your will to the one who died for you?

Today, Bartimaeus calls out to you! He beckons you to fling off your cloak and spring towards Jesus... to rededicate your life to him as sealed in your baptism... to step forward from darkness dark-as-death into the Light of God... to leave behind your spiritual blindness and to follow the Messiah... “Lord, I want to see!”