I want you to close your eyes for a few moments and imagine that you are blind. You can no longer see the beautiful gold, flaming red, and burnished bronze autumnal leaves fluttering on the trees. You cannot see the dear smiling faces of your family. Your world is unrelenting darkness; you have to rely completely on your hearing to distinguish who is talking. You are utterly helpless and reliant on other people. How will you get back home from church today? You are unable to drive. How will you work to earn money to buy food for today? Without being able to see, you are lost, scared, and dependent.

Please open your eyes now, and take a moment to thank God for your sight. Perhaps using our imagination can help us understand blind Bartimaeus' desperation to see, as described in today's Gospel story. Bartimaeus is sitting in the dirt and dust at the side of the road, his begging bowl held out to the passersby in the hope of eating today. He is unseeing and unseen, invisible, out of sight, out of mind, as the poor and powerless so often are, both in this country and around the world. Bartimaeus sits alone, still, as in the eye of a hurricane. Meanwhile everyone else around him is moving, places to go, people to see. They are excitedly accompanying Jesus, the great Teacher and Miracle Worker as He travels out of Jericho and makes His way steadfastly to Jerusalem where He alone sees that suffering and death await Him. The crowds watch Jesus' every move, and listen intently as He shares with them the good news of God's love. But suddenly, the unnamed crowds can't hear Jesus so well; some tiresome person is making a lot of noise, calling out to Jesus to help him. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" The crowds are annoyed: "Be quiet!" they shout down at him. "We can't hear Jesus. Stop being a nuisance! There is only one of you. Jesus is too busy with us to see you."

But blind Bartimaeus will not be quiet; he perseveres steadfastly in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. He is determined to meet Jesus and be healed. So he continues to yell, to cry out, to shout, to call "Son of David, have mercy on me." He knew there was something special about this Jesus, the descendant of King David. He had faith that Jesus could restore his sight; hadn't Jesus healed others? And Jesus saw this believing human being whom nobody else wanted to see. He heard his desperate cry amidst the chattering throngs, and He stopped everything. Jesus told the crowds to call Bartimaeus. Three times in one verse (49), we see the words "call." Jesus said "Call him!" And they called the blind man "Take heart! Jesus is calling you." You see, this story is not just about a miraculous healing. It is the story of Jesus’ call to an outsider to see Him as He truly is, and to follow Him on His way to suffering and death in Jerusalem. Bartimaeus springs up, throws off his cloak, the one possession he has, which kept him warm, and came to Jesus. How different joyful Bartimaeus is from the sad rich young ruler in the same chapter who had so many possessions that he turned away refusing to follow Jesus on the way.

When Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants Jesus to do for him, the blind beggar said "I want to see." Again, how different the outsider Bartimaeus is from the insiders,
Jesus' two disciples James and John. They had physically seen Jesus for three years; their eyes had watched Jesus, moved with compassion, serving and healing. Yet when they were asked what THEY wanted, James and John in chapter 9 requested power, privilege and special status for themselves alone, over all the other twelve disciples: "We want you to seat us Jesus on either side of you when you rule in your kingdom." James and John are actually the blind beggars, the outsiders, sidelined at the edge of the way, clinging to the filthy rags of earthly power. As the saying goes "there are none so blind as those who will not see." Jesus did not honor James and John's request, but he granted Bartimaeus' request. He spoke the words of healing that immediately and miraculously restored Bartimaeus' sight.

The healing of blind Bartimaeus is an important transitional story in the middle section of Mark's Gospel, focusing on the themes of physical eyesight and spiritual insight. It is the only healing story in Mark where the person healed is named; it is the only healing story in Mark where the person healed follows Jesus on the way. Soon the disciples, including Bartimaeus will see Jesus arrested; they will abandon the Lord in His hour of need, having no mercy on the Son of David. The disciples will be like the other blind man mentioned two chapters earlier at the beginning of the section; they will need a second touch of Jesus to finally be able to see Him as He really is: God Himself in human form. It will take the Resurrection of Jesus to help His disciples see that He is indeed the royal Son of David, the anointed One, the Messiah, whose death was all part of God's sovereign plan to save and heal the entire world.

Today, we may have our physical eyesight, but we still may not see clearly; we may lack insight. Is there anything or anyone blinding us from seeing clearly who Jesus Christ really is, and following Him as the only Savior of the World, God's only Son and the King of all creation? What, if anything is blinding us to the desperate needs of the human beings around us in High Point, in USA, and in the world? Do we no longer see the poor, the disabled, the mentally ill, and the incarcerated? As we enter this very busy time of the year, with Halloween celebrations, Thanksgiving and Christmas, it would be easy to miss the cries of those God puts in our path and keep walking.

Today, four people are being commissioned at the 11.00 o'clock service as they travel to Leogane, Haiti as part of a missionary team. Ed Crissman, Dottie Johnston, Betsy Lehman and David Wolff have all stopped their lives to go with CODEP from November 3rd through 10th. They have heard the call of Jesus to serve the unseen poor and marginalized. They have sprung up like Bartimaeus to follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, the place of terrible suffering and pain. In Haiti, our friends will see many beggars by the side of the streets, people with overwhelming physical needs of the most basic things; clean water, food, and a safe place to sleep. Hurricane Sandy has just passed through, displacing many people, and destroying their flimsy makeshift dwellings, as Hurricane Irene did last year, and the 2010 earthquake did before that. Please pray for our four courageous friends, for protection, safe travels and good health so that they can bring practical help and hope to those in desperate need. Please pray for the people of Haiti also.
Sing: "Day by day, dear Lord of thee three things I pray: to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day." Amen.

9.00 A.M service, sing: "Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus. To reach out and touch Him, to say that we love Him. Open our ears, Lord and help us to listen. Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus."