This is a lovely story about a poor blind man being healed by Jesus. Who wouldn’t be overjoyed if that happened to you or me? When I get a new prescription for my glasses, and put on the new lenses for the first time, everything suddenly looks clearer and it’s wonderful! Those of us who wear glasses know that experience. Imagine if we hadn’t been able to see at all, and were dirt poor as a result. It would change our lives. It’s a lovely story.

But scripture stories are more than just nice stories. There are two ways scripture stories are special. One special thing is that there are clues in the story that say it means more than just that a blind man got healed by Jesus long ago. And second, scripture is always about us, not just about something that happened long ago even if that was a wonderful thing. We call scripture “Holy” not because it’s just about what Jesus did long ago, but it’s always about what Jesus is doing to us now.

So, first, let’s look at the clues in this story.

The first clue is that the blind man is healed in Jericho. Remember, Jericho was the city that Joshua defeated when the people crossed the Jordan and entered God’s land? And the walls fell down? So when a blind man gets his sight back at Jericho, it means that the walls around his eyes fell down. And he could see again. And that meant that the walls around his life had fallen down. He must have felt like he had finally entered the land and life that God had promised.

The second clue is that this is the only man healed by Jesus whose name was remembered. His name is “Son of Timaeus.” He must have been very important to the early Christians for them to remember his name). (Mary Magelene is the only other person healed by Jesus whose name is recorded.) It’s a signal to us that we should take this story very seriously.

The third clue is that a couple of chapters earlier, Jesus healed a man born blind, but the healing didn’t quite work at first. I’m sure you remember that story, the blind man said that after Jesus healed him people looked like trees walking around. But this time the healing works completely, right away, just like every other healing Jesus did. Something is going on – it’s not that Jesus didn’t do it right the first time with the other blind man; but its means that we have something to learn about being healed. And about what “seeing” means.

And now the fourth clue. Between these two healings of blind men, the disciples three times refuse to love one another. Right before this story about Bartimaues being healed of blindness, two brothers, James and John, try to get special treatment in heaven to be closer to Jesus than the other disciples. They are greedy, aren’t they? Before that, the disciples were arguing among themselves who was the most important. And before that, right after the first man was healed, but only partly at first, Peter criticized Jesus for saying he had to be executed.

I expect you have figured out the clues so far. The story tells how the disciples were blind to Jesus’ call to lay down their lives in love. They believed in Jesus, they trusted him, they were impressed by all his miracles. But they only saw Jesus partly. What they saw was that Jesus brings life. What they didn’t see is that Jesus calls us to give up our life when we love. And that’s the only way to be fully alive. That’s what that first healing means—disciples start by only seeing part of what Jesus is about. That’s why they always want to be the most important. They don’t want to serve others. They don’t see the point. But then a second man is healed from blindness and this time completely. That’s a sign that soon the disciples will see completely.

Then the final clue becomes clear. Mark says that as soon as Bartimaeus was healed he “Followed Jesus on the way.” The early Christians were called the people of the “Way.” Or we might say, People of the “Path.” So when Bartimeaus follows Jesus on the “Path” it means that he wasn’t just walking along a road to Jerusalem, five days before Jesus was executed, it also means that Bartimaeus was starting to walk the road to giving up his own life in order to love as deeply as God loves us.

So the two blind men actually stand for you and me.

We are the disciples who often partly see what Jesus is about, and partly don’t. And in the end we will see clearly.

Mark is saying that we are all on a journey as disciples. At first we are impressed by Jesus and how strong he is and how he heals us. But at first we only see partially. Later we come to see that when Jesus heals us, we start to want to love as deeply as he did, and we start to give up our lives for other people. That’s when we are fully alive. We are then on Jesus’ “Way.”

So, for example, perhaps when we first meet someone we love, we are amazed at how wonderful they are. That’s a very special experience and maybe the first time we really got focused on someone else than our self. But before long, if we remain with them, or marry them, we find that we’ve got to give up thinking that the relationship is about making me happy. We give up that self-centred urge and that feels like dying, and then all of a sudden we are more in love than ever. And we are more alive than ever. That’s following Jesus’ Way.

Or it might be that we were really enjoying life, and having lots of fun, and then suddenly we hear we have to make some sacrifices, perhaps all of us living much more simply, with less things, in order to truly love God’s world and save God’s creatures. That can feel like dying, but when we do we really start to live, because we are living Christ’s life of self-offering love. Then we really see what it means to be part of the Body of Christ. We’re healed! And we are truly alive! Then we are as happy and delighted as Bartimaeus was!

I’m sure every one of us has things in our life where things don’t make sense and we feel as if we are blind. Perhaps we have hurt someone and don’t know how to fix that. Perhaps we’ve failed at something and feel badly. Perhaps things that should have happened, didn’t. We can’t figure it out. We keep trying to love better, but we just can’t see how. We feel blind.

We need the walls around us to fall down, like Jericho.

So, let me suggest a spiritual exercise this morning at communion. When you walk up to receive communion, pretend you are Bartimaeus and all you want is to be able to see properly. Because it’s true. We do all want to see how to love properly. Imagine that it’s Jesus calling to you to come close and receive his life. So as you come out of your pew, just like Bartimeus, you throw your cloak away, you throw away all the things that keep you from really seeing what Jesus wants you to be. Throwing your cloak away is a bit like dying. You depend on Jesus and nothing else. And you come to the altar. And Jesus gives himself to you. And you return to your pew and take Jesus’ body inside yourself. And he is healing your blindness about how to love better. And what you see is that you were always made to love, even to love at the cost of what’s important to you. And what a gift that is to see yourself! You are a person who is made to love like Jesus! You are healed of the blindness that made it seem like you weren’t a wonderful person. You see Jesus alive in you! What a gift! No wonder you follow him on his Way. And now you can love because Jesus healed your love-sight. That’s what happens in communion and it makes us really completely alive. Thanks be to God!