The Scripture we are about to read concludes the ministry of Jesus outside of Jerusalem. After this Scripture, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. It is in Jerusalem where Jesus will face persecution, conviction, and death. But the gospel of Mark records Jesus healing the sight of blind Bartimaeus as the last thing he does prior to entering Jerusalem.

I invite us to pay attention to a couple of things in this story we are about to read. Bar-timaeus. Whenever you see “bar” at the beginning of someone’s name that means “son of” in Aramaic. Jesus spoke in Aramaic. So this man that Jesus encounters is “Bartimaeus” or “Son of Timaeus.”

Also note is this scripture we are about to read the phrase “Son of David.” This is a title which connects Jesus to King David in the Old Testament. Prior to this passage the gospel writer Mark has never used an image of Jesus as an anointed king. So we see a shift in this passage about how Mark perceives Jesus.

**Read Mark 10:46-52**

In the last few weeks a lot of the discussions that have occurred in my household have been about insurance. Medical insurance questions after my surgery and my daughter’s wisdom teeth removal. Trying to get the best rate for our car insurance and home owners insurance. And deciding to take out insurance for death benefits.

Like all of us in our society, we take out insurance to avoid risk. We are required to have car insurance so in case we pull out left here and don’t speed up fast enough and hit a car coming careening over the hill then we have the ability to pay for the damages. If I am in that wreck and it causes me physical harm, the insurance is what will pay for healing. And now I have death benefits.

We have insurance on our home so in case there is a fire at a home it will not be a total loss. All of us have some type of insurance. The cost of insurance is certainly a big part of the discussion as we approach electing people to office.

Insurance is all about avoiding risk. Many of us do not like to gamble. We do not like to take risks. But today’s Scripture includes someone who takes a risk.

Jesus and the twelve disciples and other followers are about to get to Jerusalem and they come to the town of Jericho. Jericho you may know is the town in the Old Testament near the Dead Sea which the Israelites conquer as they move into the Promised Land. The book of Joshua tells the story of loud shouts and a trumpet blast leading to the destruction of the walls around Jericho.

In our story today, Jericho is the site where Jesus and his followers encounter Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. This blind beggar is sitting by the roadside and he shouts out to Jesus. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!!” The crowd tries to hush him up. But Bartimaeus continues to shout. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!!”

Unlike the crowd that tries to hush him, Jesus tells his followers to call Bartimaeus over to him. This is the second time in the gospel of Mark that Jesus is involved with healing a blind man. The first time Jesus used some spit and mud to bring about healing of a blind man. This time no touch is involved.

When Bartimaeus gets the invitation to come and see Jesus, the text says that he throws off his coat, jumps us, and comes to Jesus. Jesus asks him what he wants. He tells Jesus that he wants to see again. Jesus responds by telling him that his faith had made him well. Reminding us of the woman earlier in the gospel of Mark who had been bleeding for 12 years who was also told that her faith had made her well. Immediately, blind Bartimaeus is no longer blind. He is now known as Bartimaeus who joins in with the crowd in following Jesus into Jerusalem.

The passage raises a big question for me. The question is this, “when is it good to take a risk?” Bartimaeus took a risk by throwing off his coat and begging Jesus for healing. He took a risk to do this even though the crowd around him told him to be quiet. The pressures around him said to not disrupt the known status quo. The crowd said to him, “don’t take this risk.”

Questions about taking risks are central in a book written by Dr. Ben Carson. Ben Carson is a neurosurgeon whose specialty is separating conjoined twins. Siamese twins as they are commonly called. As he says, people who become surgeons tend to be risk takers. You don’t go into a field requiring cracking people’s heads open unless you are comfortable with risk.

Dr. Carson tells the story of meeting Laden and Laleh Bijani. These 29 year old sisters were a true rarity in the world. They had been born connected at the head. One of every 2 million births is like this. But these two sisters from Iran had accomplished quite a lot in life. The two graduated law school and were now fully qualified attorneys. But this is where the problem had arisen for these two sisters. One wanted to continue law while the other wanted to go into journalism.

The two sisters had searched the world for someone to separate them. No surgeon would take on such a difficult case. Many of Dr. Carson’s colleagues told him that doing this surgery was professionally risky. The sisters were told that they had a 50% chance that they would die from the surgery. Dr. Carson initially turned down the request to do the surgery.

But then Dr. Carson realized something. In his words, “I realized that my decision not to participate had been based on personal batting averages and success rates, and that is not who I am or the kind of person I want to be. So I prayed, ‘Lord, if you really want me to get involved, I will.” Dr. Carson realized that God had provided him with certain abilities and experience and had put two people before him that could benefit from the gifts that he had to offer.

So Dr. Carson and the surgical team of over 100 doctors and other staff went to work on the twins. In meticulous and physically draining work, these medical technicians began to separate the twins from one another. In the middle of the operation, however, one of the twins, Laden went into cardiac arrest. She died on the table. The operation on her sister continued. But Laleh also went into cardiac arrest. 90 minutes later she also died. The surgery had failed. 53 hours of surgery and two dead bodies.

In many ways we are a risk adverse culture. Our culture works against us taking risks. We watch shows like “Survivor” and “Dancing with the Stars” because we like to watch others take risks but we don’t want to take risks ourselves. We in the church are maybe the worse ones about taking risks. We prefer the phrase, “we have never done it that way before” rather than take a risk. We don’t take risks because we fear failure more than anything.

But I wonder if we who follow Christ shouldn’t be people willing to take some risks in life. There is certainly no guarantee of success when we take risks. In Dr. Carson’s case, the twins who insisted on this surgery died. In our case, the risks we take may lead to failure.

But I have come to believe that even in failure there is something to be learned. For the surgery, the failure of saving the twins has led to lots of advancement about what neurosurgeons have learned about the human brain. What some people may look to as a failure has actually been beneficial to the advancement of brain surgery because Dr. Carson was willing to take a risk and perform the surgery that his colleagues said not to do. Surgery he performed, I might add, after much prayer.

We are a risk adverse society. We spend lots of money on insurance and pass lots of laws and take lots of precautions to prevent risk. But I wonder if in our desire to protect ourselves from risk if we are not preventing ourselves from discovery and possibility? We are so fearful of failure we don’t take risks.

Maybe you are facing something in life right now and your initial reaction is to take the safe route. Maybe that is the way you have always done things. And maybe you are to take the safe and predictable route.

But maybe this story of blind Bartimaeus ripping off his coat and begging Jesus to have mercy on him is something that we need to hear right now. Maybe this is one of those times in your life when you are to take a risk. Maybe failure is not that big a deal. Maybe the risk is not really that great.

Maybe in taking the risk you will discover something new about yourself and maybe in taking the risk you will discover something new about the God who created you. AMEN.

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-Carson, Ben, “Take the Risk: Learning to Identify, Choose, and Live with Acceptable Risk,” Zondervan

-Given: October 28, 2012 in Allison Creek Pres (York, SC)