I am participating in a study to determine the best nonsurgical ways to heal torn meniscus in middle-aged people. As part of the study, I am to do 45 to 50 minutes of specific leg and glute exercises with weights three times a week. I don’t know if this treatment plan will work or not, but I committed to it, and so I will follow it. I took a three-day trip for continuing education, and so to keep this commitment, I lugged those weights and my travel mat with me and got up at 5:45 to get the exercises in. During this past week, convention week, I also got up at 5:45 to do the exercises. I am committed to eight more weeks, and I’ll follow the program whether it heals my torn meniscus or not.

When our loved ones or ourselves are struggling -- with sickness, with sadness, with financial difficulties -- we are called to continue to pray and worship God to whom we have made a commitment in our baptismal vows. We don’t know whether our loved ones will get well or our financial fortunes will improve, but we follow God anyway.

When we see brokenness in the world, such as mass shootings like the one in Pittsburgh yesterday or systemic injustice, we are called to continue to pray and to do our best to encourage tolerance and compassion. We don’t know whether our efforts will do any good, but we follow God anyway.

As part of being God’s church in this place, we have been called to commit to ministry in our community. Every Sunday, no matter what, we are here to offer worship. We’re also called to try to reach new populations. We were called to start the Café Service to provide a safe place for the church timid -- and others -- to explore questions of faith. We committed to that, and, even though we don’t know what will happen, we follow that call. Likewise, we are called to offer mindfulness workshops, and we will follow that call even though we don’t know what will happen.

Praying and continuing to serve God to the best of our abilities when the outcome is unclear is how we live out Jesus’s call to discipleship. Over the past few weeks, the theme of Mark’s Gospel has been discipleship. In the story of the rich young ruler, the young man went away sad because he struggled with giving up everything else to follow Jesus. Last week, James and John came to Jesus asking to sit at his left and right in God’s Kingdom. They quickly realized that this means being willing to die just as Jesus will, with no guarantee of reward. This week, the physically blind but spiritually visionary Bartimaeus springs up at Jesus’s call and throws off the cloak he needs for his livelihood to go to Jesus. He gives up everything he has without first knowing whether Jesus would cure his blindness. Once healed, he follows Jesus along the way. I believe Bartimeaus would have followed Jesus on the way even if he hadn’t received a physical cure. Once called, Bartimaeus committed and followed Jesus even without knowing the outcome.

Bartimaeus is an example for us in faithfulness. To be faithful, we don’t have to take on responsibility for results – we don’t have to stress with what if we show up for the Café Service and no one comes. We don’t have to take responsibility for whether attendees will become members or contributors to our church. To be faithful, we realize that our responsibility is to do our very best at the ministry to which we are called and to cast aside those things in our lives that prevent this. To be faithful, we have to love Jesus and others with all our hearts and all we have. We have to be good stewards. To be faithful, we pray. But the responsibility for results is on God, not us. That’s a different concept from the secular world, which bases everything on achievement. It’s a very freeing concept not to be responsible for results.

On the other hand, it sometimes means that our hopes and dreams for this person or for our church won’t always be manifest in the way we expect*.* Our sister church St John’s  tried a twice-a-month potluck that they hoped would meet a need in the community and introduce others to the church. Only a few people came, so despite all our faithfulness, the hopes and dreams for this ministry weren’t manifested as expected. The ministry did meet a very important need, however, that God knew about but that we did not. It met a very deep need for one woman, a friend of that church who gave generously of her time and money but never attended worship. The eight months of the potlucks turned out to have been the last eight months of her life, something none of us could have expected going into this. We helped bring this woman great joy. We kept following Jesus along the way. We never realized our hopes and dreams, but we did realize God’s plan.

We are called, like Bartimeaus to be faithful – to follow Jesus along the way, no matter what.

Bartimaeus received two gifts from Jesus. The first is that he was cured of his affliction. This doesn’t always happen when we follow Jesus – remember Paul’s constant prayer to remove the thorn in his flesh that God didn’t answer as Paul hoped. The second gift, however, is more important – Bartimaeus was healed. Healing has a different connotation than curing – it means that we have been made whole. Following Jesus faithfully always makes us whole – it makes individuals whole, it makes churches whole. It strengthens us. Just like those leg exercises, I am doing. No matter what, I’ll end up with stronger legs and glutes, even if I don’t heal the torn meniscus.

We aren’t responsible for results. Yet we are called to be faithful, like Bartimeaus, answering Jesus’s call enthusiastically and following Him along the way. And whether or not we are ever cured, we will be healed.