

**“Take Heart, Get Up, He is Calling You”**  
**Mark 10:46-52, Psalm 126**  
**October 25, 2015**  
**Stewardship Sunday**  
**The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings**

My best friend Dave and I were walking home from school during our senior year in high school. We were walking through the outdoor Boulder Mall, I'm sure discussing things close to the hearts of two good Christian young men...baseball and girls. But as we walked through the mall, we were approached by a man with a clipboard in his hands and he stopped to ask us a few questions. It turns out he was from the Church of Scientology there in Boulder and his first question was, “if you could have one thing, what would it be?” Dave quickly asked, “You mean like materially, a possession or something?” “Not necessarily,” the man replied. And without missing a beat Dave said “I want to be more like Jesus.”

Impressed, I stared at Dave. But then the guy asked me, “So, what about you?”

All I could think to say was “Me too.”

Now I admit that if I had been alone and had been asked that question, I might have come up with a different answer. I mean, I was eighteen. One thing? Maybe a car, a scholarship to college, a girl friend? But Dave, he said he wanted to be like Jesus.

What would you have said?

I'd forgotten that incident on the Boulder Mall back in 70s but meditating over this passage this week, the memory returned to me. I wondered: How would I answer that today?

Well, there are lots of things I want: My car is getting kind of old, our youngest daughter could use a new job now that she's moved to Boston. There are things that need to be fixed around the house. And don't even get me started on the Cubs.

But, on a more serious note, I want our children to have happy and meaningful lives: I would like to have a more peaceful society; I'd like a cure for diseases, like cancer; I'd like poverty to be a thing of the past.

Then I thought about the church. What do we want God to do for us, here in this church?

Do we want God to swoop in and fill our pews, fill our collection plates? Do we want to have burgeoning programs, kids running all over the church, more activities for seniors. Do we want a church that is more involved in mission? What do you want God to do for us?

This is like the question that Jesus asks Bartimaeus: *What do you want me to do for you?* A couple of weeks ago we talked about the rich, young ruler whom Jesus called to follow him, but he could not because he could not give up his wealth in order to be a disciple. We called him the *Almost Apostle*. Mark uses him as a warning not to let wealth or anything else come between us and God, come between us and the necessity to follow Jesus, between us and the poor, the vulnerable and the powerless.

But the other disciples are not very good examples either. They often don't understand what Jesus is talking about, they mistake what kind of Messiah he is going to be, and when James and John are asked the same question only a few verses before the one we read today, "What do you want me to do for you?" they say what is closest to their hearts—we want power and glory, we want to sit at your right hand and your left when you come in power. James and John are bad examples.

But that brings us to this beggar who Jesus meets on the way out of Jericho on their way to Jerusalem who begins to call out to Jesus because he is blind and he wants to be healed. We don't really know anything about this man, whether he is young or old, just that he is blind and his name is Bartimaeus. Now, it was bad enough to be a beggar and Bartimaeus was vulnerable and on the fringes of society but he was also blind. And he was so disregarded by everyone around him that when he tried to call out to Jesus, others tried to silence him. Bartimaeus is like the children so often referred to in Mark, the little ones, the powerless and once again, well-meaning others are the stumbling blocks Jesus warns us of, they are blocking Bartimaeus' access to Jesus.

Bartimaeus is blind and he wants to see. So Jesus helps him to see and then says, "Your faith has made you well." This is an important phrase and it merits close examination. Your faith has made you well... Not, "I made you well," but "your faith has made you well." Why would Jesus credit the man's faith rather than take credit for himself? It was Jesus who made him well, we read it right here in the text.

Jesus is in relationship with us and we have agency and responsibility in our own spiritual wellness. In other words, if the man did not have faith, he wouldn't have called out to Jesus in the first place. Faith is already at work in Bartimaeus. He believed in Jesus. He was in holy relationship with Jesus. This gave him faith and it was this very faith that made him well.

Now Jesus isn't saying that you don't need God or that you don't need anyone else, that you can do it all on your own. But you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you and that's the power that you need. That's what gives you faith, what causes us to reach out in holy relationship to others.

All those things that we want for the church? We aren't waiting for God to miraculously do them *for* us, but God works *through* us, here and now. We are involved in mission; we are building a youth

program; we are creating a church that makes a difference in the world. We are a church that is trying our best not to be a stumbling block to others, but to be a pathway to Jesus. This is Stewardship Sunday, and it is a day that we remember that God *is* working through us here and now. What we need, we already have—it's here among us. We carry it in our hearts, it is our faith, and just as Bartimaeus casts off his cloak, we too cast off the cloak and step up because we know that to truly be the church that God wants us to be it means stepping out in faith, in the faith that is already at work within us. Bartimaeus says he wants to see. And again, I say “me too” I want to see. Just like I said “me too” to being like Jesus that day on the Boulder Mall, I want to see. I want us to see. I want each one of you to see yourself as a beloved child of God. I want us to see that we are a community where everyone is welcome, and each person is valued, and each one's gifts are shared. That we are in holy relationship. I want us to see that we are growing, growing up spiritually into the fullness of the likeness of Christ; growing together as we constantly learn more and more about what it means to love each other, no matter what; growing each day and each year into being the Body of Christ in service to the world. I want us to see how much God has already done through us, how blessed we are, and to see what God plans through us for our future, how excited we can be, and how gratefully we can express our thanks to God for being in relationship. That's what the psalmist is describing in the text that Julie read. He sees the plans for the future, the great harvest, the people in holy relationship with God. But the people had been through difficult times, not unlike Bartimaeus, there were tears and anxiety but the psalmist promises that the tears are the seeds of the good harvest and they will joyfully come home carrying their sheaves. Like it was said to Bartimaeus, take heart, and get up, because God is calling us.

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naked. Who was it? We don't know. Maybe Bartimaeus who tries to follow Jesus no matter what? Bartimaeus who could not bear to leave Jesus even at his own peril? At the end of Mark there is another unnamed young man. When the women come to the tomb on Easter morning they find that the stone blocking the entrance to the tomb has been rolled away and seated there is a young man, this time dressed in a white robe who tells them that Jesus has been raised. A young man? An angel? Or perhaps Bartimaeus? Perhaps an ideal disciple who knows never to give up on God for whom nothing is impossible to overcome, not even death. Who knows?