

Mark 10:46-52
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46They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” 48Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” 49Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” 50So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” 52Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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, and as we were walking, I'm sure we were discussing things close to the hearts of two good Christian young men...baseball and girls. But as we went 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, without the wisdom of Dave, 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? Though I'm certain I've shared this story before, in my 37 years of preaching, it must have been some time ago because I'd forgotten all about it until this week when meditating over this passage, the memory returned to me. And I wondered: How would I answer that today? Well, there are lots of things I want: sensible things like...more money in my retirement fund.

Or why not go big? Like say, that the Lions win a Super Bowl, OR the ability to hit a big league curve ball. I'd like to have those. But, truly, what do I want? I want our children to have happy and meaningful lives: I would like to have a more peaceful society; I'd like COVID and cancer to be gone; or 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? What do you want God to do for us? I admit, my personal life and my church life are actually pretty blessed and we probably don't spend nearly enough time counting our blessings while spending too much time thinking about what we want. Both my personal life and church life are focused on loving others, being a good person, helping others in need. But we still have needs, don't we? We need COVID to be eradicated, or cancer to be cured. We need to understand and respond better to things like depression and anxiety. We need a world that remembers how to love, or forgive. There are many things, too many to name, that the world needs to be a better place for all who live within it. What do you want for you? For this church?

Jesus asks Bartimaeus: *What do you want me to do for you?* A couple of weeks ago we talked about the rich young ruler to whom Jesus called to follow, but the demand to give up his wealth was a big ask and we're left not knowing what ever happened. Mark uses him as a warning, as an example not to let wealth or anything else come between us and God, to come between us and the necessity to follow Jesus, to come 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—as we read last week-- 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 and on his way to Jerusalem, a man who calls out to Jesus. 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. We know he is a beggar on the fringes of society, which made him vulnerable. Worse, we know he is blind and this affliction no doubt contributes to his poverty, for how is he expected to work? So we know Bartimaeus is doubly challenged at least. Is he loved? Does he have friends to keep him company? Friends he can trust not to steal what little he has? We cannot know but we can assume that one challenge often leads to another and then another in life. This man is so invisible, so disregarded by everyone around him, that when he tries to call out to Jesus, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” the others try to silence him. Maybe he is embarrassing to them, maybe they are ashamed of him. We do know that he was, what Jesus refers to as, “the least” in a society with much wealth.

Bartimaeus is like the children so often referred to in Mark, the little ones, the powerless, and once again, others become the stumbling blocks Jesus warns us of, the stumbling blocks we talked about a few weeks ago, when others seek to trip you up because they are threatened in some way by you. The people around Bartimaeus become a stumbling block, they don’t want him to waste their time with Jesus, perhaps they are even ashamed of the way he is treated and in that moment it is easier to deny him, shut him up, block his access to Jesus. Like sweeping the dirt under the rug when company comes. Until...Jesus acknowledges him...calls him forth.

Did you notice how they suddenly changed? The people around Bartimaeus? Only moments earlier they were hushing him, hiding him. Do you believe their hearts melted in an instant and they suddenly had pity on him? “Take heart, get up, he’s calling you!” Well, maybe that’s what happened for some of them. I believe people’s hearts can change in an instant. That they can be touched by grace and having witnessed grace can now be more gracious, but the cynic in me tells me that many of them wanted to look good in front of Jesus and so the same vanity that inspired them to hide the beggar, lest he embarrass them, is now the vanity that inspires them to pretend to care so they won’t look bad to Jesus.

Bartimaeus approaches Jesus and Jesus asks the question... What do you want me to do for you? “ My teacher, let me see again,” he responds. Did you notice that Jesus asked him? He didn’t just assume he knew what Bartimaeus was seeking. But...he *ASKED him*. Jesus sees the personhood of Bartimaeus. That he is a beloved child of God. That he has a mind to think and a mouth to speak and so he gives him the respect that no one else has given him. He gives Bartimaeus *agency* to name what it is that he needs. “My teacher, let me see again,” So, Jesus helps him. He heals his blindness and 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. 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. And 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 creating a better method to respond to needs through our Tuesday group about faith and our call to serve; we are trying to be 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. 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. 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, forgive 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. Like it was said to Bartimaeus, take heart, and get up, because God is calling us.