

Sermon – Mark 10:46-52 – Pentecost 22 – October 24, 2021

“What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet.” Unless your name is Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus. Bar (son of) Timaeus. And Aramaic sources tell us that Timaeus would mean either “Honored one” or “Impure one.” Bartimaeus could then be understood as “Son of fame” or “Son of shame.” Let's decide.

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was a nobody. People often walked past Bartimaeus and at best they thought of the blind beggar as a nuisance. Day in and day out Bartimaeus would make his way to his familiar spot. Feeling his way along the crowded streets of Jericho, Bartimaeus was invisible to the people who hustled by on the way to something glamorous and important.

And it is no surprise that this story takes place in Jericho. Jericho wasn't just any city; Jericho was a city for the important people. Herod had his winter palace there and all the affluent Roman families spent their winters in Jericho. Jericho was an oasis, a destination city. You couldn't get to Jerusalem without passing through Jericho so anyone who wanted to be seen had to have an address in Jericho.

So, every morning Bartimaeus made his way to the Jericho Road, knowing the class of people who would pass by - the military, the wealthy, the royalty, the important people. Jericho Road was the place to be if you were a blind beggar. But even on the main road Bartimaeus was invisible. Occasionally someone would drop a copper penny or two in his bowl so that he could eat for the day. But deep down in his heart Bartimaeus knew he was someone.

Then something happened that changed Bartimaeus' life forever. He heard that the Rabbi named Jesus was in Jericho. This Rabbi had been preaching and large crowds of people gathered to hear him, but Bartimaeus couldn't get close. He had heard about Jesus, whispers here and there that Jesus could perform miracles, that he cured the sick and preached about God's love.

Bartimaeus decided this was his chance, this was his time. Jesus was passing by, and he mustered every ounce of strength he had and shouted "Jesus, so of David have mercy on me!" The good people following Jesus, even his disciples, told Bartimaeus to be quiet but he yelled all the louder; "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

It happened almost too quickly. This man who for most of his life was invisible, this man who no one recognized, this nobody was standing before of Jesus. The words tumbled out of his mouth faster than his brain could process them; "My teacher, let me see again." And Jesus's response "Your faith has made you well." Or what the Greek tells us Jesus said is "What you have done out of trust has made you complete."

The story of Bartimaeus is often held up as one of the great healing miracles of Jesus. In the gospels Jesus transforms the lives of those on the margins and draws them more and more into the center. But what if we saw this story as the crowd, the followers of Jesus, being blind and not Bartimaeus.

The crowd in our gospel saw this blind beggar as annoyance, disturbing Jesus as he preached God's Vision. But Jesus skillfully moves him from the sidelines, recognizes his humanity and dignity and draws him closer to the center.

Bartimaeus wasn't blind where it really mattered. Bartimaeus had a perfect vision of what it meant to be a beloved child of God. Not only did he know that he was a beloved child of God he insisted on being treated like a beloved child of God. Not even the crowd could hold him back and Jesus recognizes him for his bravery.

We as the church can quickly become like the crowd; blind to the needs of those sitting right outside our doors. When John and I did a tour through the Mediterranean we visited a lot of churches and I was about ½ way through the trip before I realized the people – often mostly men – standing at the church door with bowl or basket in hand were actually beggars and not church members taking admission. We don't see that too often in the North American Church. The Bartimaeus's of our day in our part of the world do not necessarily sit with a bowl begging and blind, but rather, they are the ones in greatest need reaching out along the Jericho road leading into our church. Like in our gospel we, the crowd, are the ones in need of having our sight restored, our blindness healed, our vision focused.

And if we listen hard enough and look long enough we hear the cries of Bartimaeus in our city and Country. Listen...

Jesus, son of David have mercy on us....

- We are the ones who are blinded by a world who deems us a nuisance.
- We are the ones who have been told time and again that we are of no value that we are outside the realm of God's love and peace.
- We are the ones blinded by the pain of grief and loss, broken relationships and failed dreams.
- We are the ones blinded by a disease and crippled by a diagnosis.
- We are the ones blinded by the word's immigrant and refugee.
- We are the ones blinded by the misapprehension of our sexuality.
- We are the ones blinded by the color of our skin or Indigenous claim.

How do we respond to the many Bartimaeus's in our own time?

Notice in the gospel the crowd is the first miracle of healing. The crowd is given their sight and actually sees Bartimaeus. They tell him "Take heart; he is calling you." And once their blindness is cured the crowd didn't pray for Bartimaeus, they didn't form a committee, or call a meeting or even have a theological discussion on the merits of Bartimaeus. The crowd saw him and showed him to Jesus and let Jesus do the rest.

The same is true for us. We are called as followers of the Rabbi Christ to first be healed of our blindness so that we can see clearly to invite others to share in Christ's healing.

Once we as the church recognize those on the margins, those sitting on the sidelines, our faith demands that we show them God and together be healed.

Because if you notice at the end of the Gospel story Bartimaeus didn't go off and create "The Society for the Formerly Blind of Jericho", he didn't go dancing through the streets shouting from the rafters, he "regained his sight and followed."

Bartimaeus. Who, society deemed "Son of Shame" and God deemed "Son of honor."

We have stood in the way, blocking the Bartimaeus' of our world as they shout "have mercy." Are we ready to be healed of our own blindness? And are we ready to let others be made complete by God? Amen.