

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
27 October 2024

Mark 10: 46-52

He doesn't come to Jesus seeking to make a deal, like the young man who asks what he must do to inherit the Kingdom of God. He knows that he has nothing to offer at all. And he does not pretend he does. He does not claim for himself the righteousness of the law and doesn't pretend he has followed Moses all his life, like that rich young man. In fact, he knows he is a sinner, an unclean man who is not allowed into the Temple, not allowed to testify in a court of law, and who is forced to beg on the periphery of buildings and highways. Today he is begging by a roadside, which means that he is not "on the highway, on the road, on the way."

He doesn't come asking Jesus for a place of honor in his kingdom, like the religious insiders of the movement have done. He doesn't have the expectations of the insiders, nor the malice of the critics. He knows he is not one of Jesus' own disciples and in fact, he is aware that he is nothing but a nuisance to them. They try to quiet him; they want him silenced. It would be completely understandable if this Rabbi ignores his cries and moves on. Who could blame him? The Rabbi is a righteous Jew and must manage public opinion very carefully. There are Temple authority spies everywhere. He cries out in desperation, but he knows the chances are slim that this man would listen to his pleas.

He approaches Jesus with the courage of those who know they have nothing left to lose. Public opinion doesn't matter to him anymore, even if some believed his illness dishonored his family. He comes to this Rabbi with a whole lot of nothing: No wealth, no reputation, no rights to Jesus' mercy, no place in society, no box seat at the temple. He is an outcast and he comes to Jesus empty, needy, overwhelmed, disenfranchised, and alone. He is not a follower of "the way," as Jesus's followers called themselves. He is an outsider. He is not on the road or on the way. He was outside of the movement, outside of polite society, outside of righteous temple worship, and outside of any circles of influence in the city or in his family. He has become like a piece of furniture everyone passes by without ever noticing. He is just one of many beggars in a stratified and unfair society

intent on creating more beggars. He and people like him have had the deck stacked against them for generations and he has nothing to give, and nothing left to lose.

Yet, his courage and his faith are exemplary. He refuses to remain in the shadows. At the first chance he has, he grasps for the light with such emotion and drive that no one can force him to be silent. The passage gives us a list of active words to describe his behavior: He *heard* that the person coming down the road was the famous Rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. He then began to *shout*, using the title by which the young Rabbi is called by others, “Son of David.” He *refused to be silenced* when the crowds become uncomfortable by his impassioned and desperate cries. He *sprang up* or jumped to his feet when Jesus called for him to come to him. He *came* to Jesus filled with hope that this young man might be able to heal him. He had heard that this Jesus had healed many and he prayed that he might be one of these. He is not shy when he speaks to Jesus, calling him “the Son of David” and “My teacher”, perhaps fully aware that the name “Son of David” was short for Messiah, or Christ.

He, who has not had the benefit of a relationship with Jesus, who has no education in Jewish theology, who has received no divine revelation about the identity of the Nazarene, and who has not read the apocalyptic literature of Ezekiel or Daniel, calls him “Son of David”, when the disciples themselves are still unsure about who Jesus really is. This is intentional in the Gospel of Mark. The healing of this blind man closes a section in the Gospel some call, “The Cost of Discipleship.” This section starts with the healing of a blind man on 8:22-26 and ends with the blind man today. In between these healings we see Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the foretelling of Jesus’ death (twice), the Transfiguration event, several healings, and two very sad events: Jesus calls Peter “Satan” because the Apostle opposes Jesus’ announcement of his death and resurrection. The second sad event is the disciples arguing about who was the greatest. Even after three years, they show a great failure to understand who this Jesus really is. In the meantime, we have a blind man here who calls Jesus by his Messianic title and whose faith is praised by Jesus. I believe Mark is asking us, “Who is the truest disciple, the movement’s insiders or this outsider?”

He asked clearly for what he needs, “*Let me see again.*” This simple statement implies that he believes Jesus to have the power to heal. It implies that

this Jewish Rabbi is much more than what people believe him to be. He has a deeper understanding of Jesus' mission than most of his followers and disciples. Finally, and most remarkably, he *followed* Jesus "on the way." He became one of his disciples. He could have gone anywhere now that he was able to see, but he chose to follow the one responsible for his healing. In fact, something remarkable happened to this man. The blind man of chapter 8 was sent home and not allowed to follow Jesus, but this man was allowed to follow Jesus "On the Way."

Holy Scripture doesn't tell us what ultimately happened to this blind man. Did he go on to plant churches? Was he martyred for proclaiming Jesus? Did he ascend in authority in the Jerusalem Church? Did he ever meet Paul? Did he go back to his former life after Jesus' crucifixion? We really don't know. Perhaps Bartimaeus represents the faith of the laity of our church, that 20% of people who do 80% of all the work of the church, and seldom get any of the credit. Perhaps, he represents the quiet faith of those who await patiently for the salvation of the Lord and place all their trust in Christ. Perhaps, he represents the contagious Christian who once saved cannot stop telling others about what Christ has done for him. But even if we don't know much about this blind beggar, the question Jesus asks him is enough to give us hope today.

Bartimaeus approached Jesus with an expectation of a miracle. He knows God is infinitely large and full of compassion and this Jesus has God's power on his side. Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" This is an incredible question Christ still asks us today. The problem is that we have lost the ability to believe in miracles. We don't come to Jesus expecting restoration. We have a very small God, and we are not hungry enough, needy enough, desperate enough, or hurt enough to place all our hope on Christ. We have become too satisfied with our comforts and privileges. We are too busy building larger granaries and accumulating new shiny toys. We are too full to fill ourselves with the healing and wholeness that can only come from God in Christ.

I wonder what we would answer if Christ asked us this very day, "What do you want me to do for you? Where is your area of deepest pain? What hurts the most? How can I bring restoration and healing into your life?" I invite all of you to approach this Jesus with an expectation of a miracle because we have a great, huge God who loves us and longs to give us the restoration we need. Amen!