

“The naked truth”

- Have you ever had that dream?
 - You know, the one where you find yourself in front of the classroom in high school
 - And suddenly, everyone is pointing, and laughing, and you look down only to realize...
 - You are standing there naked in front of everyone!
 - Fully seen, the naked truth there for all to see
 - It is a very common dream, or something similar where you find yourself the subject of unwanted attention for bad reasons
 - A quick search on the internet suggests that it is a very common motif
 - And that it is a stress related dream¹
 - So if you have had it during the pandemic or in other high stress times of life, maybe that helps explain it
 - Dr. Kevin Gilliland on [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com/health/common-stress-dreams-anxiety#5-common-anxiety-nightmares-that-might-sound-very-familiar) even says that perhaps it is even bringing up our normal “fears of vulnerability, shame, and disappointing people”
 - “The fear of that we will forget something and be exposed,” he says
 - Have you had that dream?
 - I have not had the pleasure of the naked version, but I have definitely dreamed a similar one
 - Where I stepped into the pulpit only to realize I had forgotten to write a sermon that week!
 - Whatever variation of that dream you may have had, you know that feeling of exposure, of everyone knowing the truth now.
 - Of being seen.
- Well then just imagine how blind Bartimaeus must have felt as he got up to go see Jesus
 - We really do not know much about the man whom Mark’s gospel names Bartimaeus, other than he is blind

¹ <https://www.healthline.com/health/common-stress-dreams-anxiety#5-common-anxiety-nightmares-that-might-sound-very-familiar>

- And that disability has pushed him into destitution and he has resorted to begging
- The name itself, however, sheds some light: literally translated, it means the son of Timaeus
 - It is actually stated twice in Mark's gospel- Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus
 - That is redundant, so scholars are tempted to believe it is there for emphasis
 - And why that is important is this: Timaeus is literally translated, "defiled one."²
 - Bartimaeus is the son of the defiled one, and in name and legacy
 - Those around him probably believe the blindness was due to the father's sin (like in John 9:1)
- Now when Bartimaeus realizes that Jesus has come near him, he starts yelling, disrupting, making a scene
- And truth be told, he has to, or he will simply be ignored just like every other time- he is the guy society wants NOT to see
- But he will not have it- "Son of David," he yells, which is a risky thing for sure, definitely makes a scene
- Son of David has very real and strong overtones of the one who will lead the uprising and restore Israel
- Risky because they are leaving Jericho, where Israelite national pride would have run deep³
 - It was after all where they entered the promised land after leaving Egypt and wandering in the wilderness
 - Where Joshua fought the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down!
 - And where King Herod had a winter palace
- And they are on the road to Jerusalem, where the temple is located, the center of their spiritual identity
- And this blind man is declaring Jesus the general of the Israelite army in Rome's backyard and in the heart of ancient Israel

² *Timaeus*, © Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary. These Dictionary topics are from M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Third Edition, 1897.

³ PulpitFiction, Retrieved online 10/22/21, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pulpit-fiction-podcast/id601880520?i=1000538773729>

- The crowd rebukes him, the same word used when Jesus rebukes demons⁴- they try and make him invisible
- But he won't have it- he is blind, but he can see something that the others only have a vague notion about
- Jesus stops, hears the man, and tells the crowd to call him here
- And Bartimaeus, God love him, he throws off his cloak, and jumps up to go see Jesus
- We are pretty sure that, as a beggar, the cloak would have been the only thing he owned. No really, the only piece of clothing he owned.⁵
- But he didn't care- he left everything he had and stood before Jesus naked and visible and without pretense
- No one could ignore him now.
- Jesus asks him: What do you want me to do for you?
- And he says, in that King James English, "Lord, that I might receive my sight."
- Jesus says, "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." And he received sight.
- Some of these themes in this encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus might sound a little familiar- even da ja vu
 - Two Sundays ago we talked about the rich young man who came to see Jesus
 - And Jesus looked deeply into his eyes, and loved him, and saw him naked before Jesus, at least spiritually if not physically
 - The young man also had a request of Jesus: eternal life
 - But the rich man just could not take that step that blind Bartimaeus did so casually- Bartimaeus left everything he had and followed Jesus
 - And you and I might think to ourselves: yeah, but all he had was a dirty cloak.
 - Anyone would trade a dirty cloak for a life with Jesus! It was so easy for Bartimaeus
 - The rich young man had a whole lot more than that, you cannot expect him just toss everything instantly.... can you?
 - And I think at that point of realization, we, the readers, maybe get much closer to understanding what Jesus meant

⁴ Marion Soards, ed., *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Year B After Pentecost 2, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) 110-111

⁵ PulpitFiction, Retrieved online 10/22/21, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pulpit-fiction-podcast/id601880520?i=1000538773729>

- What he was teaching when he compared the rich man entering heaven with the camel going through the eye of the needle.
- And then gave us two examples of how it plays out.
- These two encounters in the gospel of Mark right here at the beginning of the end of Jesus's ministry are point and counterpoint
- About what it means to be a disciple.
- On one extreme a rich young man who cannot let go, and then goes away sad
- And on the other a blind beggar who so easily lets go of everything
 - Finds healing, finds wholeness
 - And discovers how to follow Jesus on the "way."
- It is not just about his physical eye sight- this is about true seeing, true understanding about Jesus
- This is about wholeness and a restoration of the man and his father's legacy- no longer defiled but accepted and seen
- And the lingering implications for all of us about what it means to follow Jesus on The Way
- And with these two encounters, these two object lessons standing in stark contrast to one another
 - Mark's gospel finishes the teaching section on what it means to follow Jesus and be a disciple
 - What it will cost, what it takes, and challenges each and every one of us to look at our own life and see our selves clearly
 - To stand before Jesus and show the naked truth, and be seen and challenged
 - Bartimaeus leaves the cloak behind, hopefully finds something to wear, and follows Jesus
 - But what happens next is amazing- Bartimaeus really gets the crowd going!
 - His yelling out, "Son of David!" energizes everyone. His cloak that falls to the ground starts inspiring those who see it, who witness his healing
 - Who also want to see, and who long for wholeness
 - They start shouting too- the whole crowd starts shouting "Son of David!" "Hosannah" "Save us"
 - And "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."
 - They too throw their cloaks off and onto the road in front of Jesus
 - Some grab Palm branches to wave
 - They put Jesus on a donkey and they walk in a protest parade right into the gates of Jerusalem, into the heart of Roman occupation

- The very next chapter is the triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the beginning of Jesus's own cost for following God's will in his life
- I think the crowd starts to see as well as Bartimaeus now does, or at least they want to.
- As we enter into this story with Jesus and Bartimaeus, perhaps we are invited to answer the same question
 - Jesus looked at Bartimaeus and asked him, what seems like an obvious question,
 - "What do you want me to do for you?"
 - What would you say if Jesus looked you in the eye, after hearing you calling out, and asked you that?
 - Perhaps we might be tempted to respond with something more shallow, if we answer too quickly ⁶
 - Take away our stress, our money troubles, our physical conditions
 - Bring more people through the door of the church
 - Make us successful
 - Help us to help people
 - And while all of that is good, maybe we could ask Jesus the same thing Bartimaeus did:
 - "Let me see."
 - Let me see as you do, Jesus, when I look at others around me, and hear about strangers on the news
 - Let me see as you do, Jesus, when I look into the mirror and feel exposed, shamed, and judged
 - Let me see as you do. Let me see love. Let me see how to share it.
 - One more thing about Bartimaeus: notice he did not wait for healing before jumping up naked before Jesus ⁷
 - Jesus calls to him, and he goes. Long before he gets to ask for sight
 - I think maybe it was really in that moment, when Bartimaeus made his way to Jesus literally stumbling around blind
 - That was when he found his wholeness.
 - This we know- Jesus is always calling
 - Let's go learn to see.

Amen.

⁶ Whitney Rice, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermon/what-do-you-want-me-to-do-for-you-pentecost-22-b-october-24-2021/>

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