

What do you want me to do for you?

Mark 10:46-52

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Emmanuel Episcopal Church

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In the Bible, we have to pay special attention to minor characters. Especially the ones with names. In the Gospel story today, we meet a man named Bartimaeus. This man could arguably be the most role model disciple that we meet in the gospel. In six verses, Bartimaeus embodies what Jesus has been teaching for the last 10 chapters. And yet, how many people name their children after him? Perhaps this needs to be on the list of popular names for 2019. Perhaps we need more Bartimaeus'.

Let's locate ourselves in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has been urgently teaching his disciples what it looks like to be a disciple, to follow him. Three times now, he has told his disciples that he is going to suffer and die. This is the final story on the road to Jerusalem. The next chapter, is the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is an important moment, an end or culmination.

In the story preceding this, Jesus has just been accosted by two of his disciples, James and John, teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. What is it you want me to do for you, Jesus asked. The answer: sit at your right and left in your glory. These two disciples, two insiders, two of the chosen and special, after all of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God, about leaving behind wealth and family, and prestige; are still missing the point.

Immediately following, Jesus is leaving Jericho, walking with his disciples and surrounded by a large crowd. A man named Bartimaeus, who is described as a blind beggar, is sitting by the roadside. He is probably begging there, with his cloak spread out to catch the alms that people would give. The road from Jericho to Jerusalem is well travelled, with many people on spiritual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, especially likely to give generously to the poor. Bartimaeus hears that the man passing by with the crowd is Jesus, and he begins to yell. Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. The crowds try to silence him. They order him to be quiet, but he yells louder. Jesus stops. Call him here. When Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is calling him, he throws off his cloak, leaps off of the ground, and comes to Jesus.

Let's stop here for a second, because this is significant. In Jesus' day, a cloak was a significant possession. Cloaks could be a symbol of status or lack of status. A wealthy person would be distinguished by their fine, elegant cloak. For the poor, a cloak might be the only possession that the person has, and beggars would often spread their cloaks on the ground to collect alms from people passing by. In the OT God gives a very explicit command that no one should take a cloak overnight as collateral for a loan, because the person might not have any other clothing to keep them warm at night.

Imagine this man, with his most valuable possession stretched out around him, with his daily income resting on it, hastily throwing it aside and sprinting over to Jesus. In this

moment, like James and John, he has left behind his business, everything he has, to be with Jesus. He has left behind what is the most valuable to approach this teacher from Galilee.

What does Jesus say to him? “What do you want me to do for you?” It’s the same question Jesus has just asked James and John. The blind man says, my teacher, let me see again. Jesus says, “Go, Your faith has made you well.” Immediately Bartimaeus regains his sight. Jesus heals the blind man; he shows mercy. But he points back to Bartimaeus’ faith as the reason for his healing. Your faith has healed you; saved you. This is the same word in Greek, the word *sozo*. Healed = saved. Salvation is complete and holistic. It is about our whole bodies, our whole selves.

Jesus tells him to go, and where does Bartimaeus go? He follows Jesus on the way. This is exactly what it means to be a disciple in the Gospel of Mark. To follow Jesus on the way. But don’t forget; Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. In fact, he is on the outskirts of the city and arriving soon. Bartimaeus joins Jesus on the road, not for the fanfare and the feeding miracles and the calming of the sea and the other amazing moments of Jesus’ ministry. He joins Jesus on the road to suffering, death, and resurrection. He follows Jesus on the road to surrender, to servanthood, to giving one’s possessions and one’s own life.

Bartimaeus is the model disciple. After so many stories and so many teaching moments and so many lessons, over and over again, with his closest friends and strangers, finally, here is a man who shows us what it is to be a disciple of Jesus, to follow him in this upside down Kingdom where the last are first, the greatest are servants, the children are honored, the rich are called to sell their possessions and give the money to the poor, there is enough/provision for everyone.

What does this mean if we are to be disciples of this Jesus? I keep coming back to the question that Jesus asked, James, John, and Bartimaeus: what do you want me to do for you? How would you answer this question if Jesus asked it of you? What do you want me to do for you? Our real, honest answer might say a lot about where we are on the road of following Jesus. Are we with James and John, wanting status, prestige, worldly greatness? Are we with Bartimaeus, who asked Jesus for mercy, healing? Please, let me see.

Our social/physical situation has impact on our answer to this question. Where we are located on a scale of privilege, power, and wealth matters. We see in the Gospels that many of the people who were healed by Jesus had a sense of desperation; a nothing to lose boldness. When you don’t have healthcare and you are sick, you understand the desperation of a person asking Jesus for healing. When your loved ones are Latino, you understand the terror of ICE and the gutwrenching desperation over immigration and detaining children. When you have a transgender child, you become desperate by the political climate and danger of eliminating laws that protect their rights. When you love an African American boy, you know the desperate fear of white supremacy. When your faith has marked you for centuries, sending you to exile, gas chambers, and marking you for persecution and hatred for centuries, you know the longing to gather for worship and live life without being afraid of hated and being attacked. What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asked. Our social location matters when we answer this question.

It matters if we are asking for mercy or just for more privilege. In the last two chapters of Mark, we've seen the wealthy and privileged called to surrender, to renounce, to give up. The rich man is told: sell your possessions and give the money to the poor. James and John are told: you must be a servant not one who is served. The disciples are told: you want to be the greatest? Welcome a child. Renounce. Be humbled. Surrender.

Jesus shows himself to be one who shows mercy, who grants relief and new life. What are we to do about this? In our struggle, when we are poor, outcast, sick, underprivileged, we call out to him for mercy, ignoring the crowds when they tell us to be quiet, desperate for healing. We are assured: God hears; God sees; God will act for healing. And if we find ourselves as comfortable or privileged, not personally affected by the real pain of those clamoring for mercy, we choose not to ignore the pain and desperation of others, just because it does not personally affect me in my privilege. Don't ignore the cries of Bartimaeus, or try to silence him because you are annoyed by his loud cries. Listen to the pain of others, the stories they have to tell, the fears, the experiences, the struggles. Act to dismantle; use your privilege to disrupt. Take sides with the poor, the outcast, the not-privileged. Make it personal. Make it family.

We all need a Bartimaeus in our family, to call us to faith and show us how to follow Jesus on the way. Thanks be to God who is merciful; God help us to be disciples as faithful as Bartimaeus.