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Mark 10:46-52
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Blind Bartimaeus

This morning we are going to dive into the story of Blind Bartimaeus. Each of the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke have stories of Jesus healing the blind as he was on his way to Jerusalem just before his passion. Mark, however, is the only one who calls the blind beggar by name. In fact, he is the only person I can recall in scripture who bares a proper name. Bartimaeus or Bar [Son of] Timaeus. We don't know who Timaeus was but we do know that there was a Timaeus who was one of Jesus' later disciples and founders of the early church.

Scripture also tells us that he was stationed along the roadside just on the outskirts of Jericho which was one of Israel's oldest cities dating back to 9,000 BC. We remember that this is where Joshua fought the battle at Jericho and the walls came tumbling down. It was an oasis in the desert located about seventeen miles from Jerusalem and ten miles from the Dead Sea. It was also one of the lowest cities on earth, lying at just 825 feet below sea level.

The path up to Jerusalem (and you always went "up to Jerusalem") was one that pilgrims often took on their way to celebrate the great Jewish feasts. It wined up hillsides and climbed to 3,500 feet and was laden with robbers who would target pilgrims carrying tithes and offerings up to the temple for worship. In this case, the crowds that Mark mentioned were less likely followers of Jesus, and most likely pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

Beggars lining the path would hope to benefit from the kindness and almsgiving of these pilgrims. Beggars would also be outside the city gates because, as blind, sick, or lame, they were considered cursed by God and cast outside of the city fellowship. Bartimaeus we are told was seated on the ground with his cloak spread out so he could collect the coins as they were tossed at him by passersby.

This is the setting where Jesus and his disciples encounter Bartimaeus.
Please join me as we read from Mark 10:46-52.

46 Then [Jesus and his disciples] came to Jericho. As [they], together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. **47** When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

49 Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”

50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

51 “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

52 “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

There are three themes that I want to explore in today’s text. The first is how the humble are often the recipients of grace in the kingdom of God. Second is how Bartimaeus, though blind, was able to see Jesus more clearly as the Messiah than were Jesus’ own disciples. And finally, we see how true discipleship is most evident by our persistent prayers and actions as we lay before Jesus in the face of significant opposition.

If we recall from last week, James and John, two of Jesus’ closest disciples, had the audacity to come to Jesus for a particular request.

Jesus said, “What do you want me to do for you?”

They said, “Give us places of honor in your coming kingdom.”

And then Jesus preceded to tell them that even he could not grant such a request. But then he painted a picture of the kingdom of God. Where the first would be last. The last would be first. Whoever was considered least in this world would be greatest. And that whoever wanted to become great among them, must first become a servant of all. Especially of those who were considered least in the world. Like Blind Bartimaeus who was the first person they encountered after this.

But did the disciples get it? NO! They seemed to be even more blind than Bartimaeus. Notice how Bartimaeus upon learning that Jesus of Nazareth was approaching cried out to him, tried catch his attention, and plead for his mercy.

Did the disciples try to serve Bartimaeus so that he could reach Jesus? NO!

They rebuked Bartimaeus and told him to be quiet. Apparently they thought, Jesus, their Messiah, was just too busy on his way to take Jerusalem by storm. He could not be bothered by a poor blind beggar.

Remember when the same thing happened as parents brought their little children to Jesus for his blessing? The disciples did the same thing. They assumed that Jesus was just too busy and important to spend time with these little ones.

Jesus told them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”¹

¹ Mark 9:37

So the disciples, despite their good intentions, had become barriers to God's grace instead of generous dispensers of it.

This leads me to wonder, before whom might we be setting up barriers to God's grace in our role as Jesus' disciples today? What groups of people have we refused to welcome into our fellowship because we deemed them unworthy of Jesus' love and attention? How might we be the blind ones in the kingdom of God?

Or differently how might we relate to Bartimaeus today?

Perhaps we feel overlooked, forgotten, or discounted in some way. Maybe Jesus is trying to say to us "I see you."

Bartimaeus was considered among the lowest of the low in Israel. He most likely wasn't allowed within the city. He had to beg outside the city gates. And yet Jesus stopped to grant him attention.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked. The same question Jesus asked of James and John who came from a position of prestige and entitlement. They wanted power and glory. Bartimaeus came from a position of weakness and disentanglement. He wanted the one thing that would restore his life and dignity. Sight.

Not only would he be able to see again, but he could show himself to the temple priest that he had been healed and then would then be able to be worship among his community of faith once again. No longer would he have to sit among the other "cursed" people in isolation. The scripture said that immediately upon receiving his sight, he followed Jesus on his way up to Jerusalem.

Next, we see how Bartimaeus, though blind, was able to see Jesus more clearly as the Davidic Messiah than Jesus' own disciples. Notice how twice Bartimaeus cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

This phrase "Son of David" was used throughout Jewish literature to describe the Messiah. But nowhere in this Gospel does Mark even mention Jesus' Davidic ancestry. Only Matthew and Luke detail it in their birth narratives of Jesus. Mark does use it however to set the stage for what happens next in the story. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday when everyone else will claimed Jesus as the one who came in then name of the Lord and who was to usher in the coming kingdom of their father David.

In Luke's gospel, he recounted Jesus words at the beginning of his public ministry when he stood up in his hometown synagogue and read the words of the prophet Isaiah.

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and

recovery of the sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."²

Jesus in doing this miracle for Bartimaeus was fulfilling the Messianic prophecy.

Jesus was the Davidic Messiah.

This was not the only time that the disciples had witnessed Jesus restoring sight to the blind. But why were they unable to see Jesus clearly?

Perhaps it was expectations. They expected their Messiah to do something different than what they experienced. They expected one thing. Jesus delivered another. They expected a strong political warrior. Jesus was a gentle and humble healer.

What expectations might we have for Jesus that are misplaced?

What hasn't Jesus done for us that we thought for sure he would once we decided to follow him?

How has the Church let us down and not performed in the way we thought it should?

How are we disappointed with God today?

Disappointment is all about unmet expectations.

Like Bartimaeus cloak, those expectations and disappointments could be weighting us down and might need to be cast aside before we came humbly come to Jesus, accept the Savior as he truly is, and ask him unhindered what we desire of him.

The last thing that I want to lift up this morning is how Bartimaeus represents true discipleship as was evident by his persistent prayers and actions when he laid before Jesus in the face of significant opposition. One commentator wrote, "Persistence is an important sign of faith in Mark's gospel and is frequently rewarded by Jesus."³

There was the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof by his friends.⁴ There was the synagogue ruler Jairus who's daughter was sick and who came to Jesus pleading earnestly with him for her healing.⁵ There was the woman who had been sick and bleeding for twelve years who came and touched Jesus among the crowd.⁶ There was the Gentile woman who's daughter was possessed by an evil spirit. She came and fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to drive the

² Luke 4:18-19; Isaiah 61:1,2

³ Mark L. Strauss, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 471.

⁴ Mark 2:5

⁵ Mark 5:21-23

⁶ Mark 5:30

demon out of her.⁷ There was a deaf and mute man that some people brought to Jesus and begged him to heal.⁸ There was a blind man at Bethsaida the people begged Jesus to touch him.⁹ And finally there was the man we encountered a few weeks back who desperately asked Jesus to heal his son with an evil spirit.¹⁰

In each of these stories, people had to overcome significant barriers in order to get themselves before Jesus. Every time, Jesus took notice of their faith in doing so. Sometimes all they could bring was faith the size of a mustard seed. And Jesus did exactly as they asked.

Even in our story today, Bartimaeus showed initiative. He heard that Jesus was coming. He called out to Jesus. He threw off his cloak when Jesus called him. He jumped up. And he came to Jesus. Remember at that point, he was still blind. But in desperation he did what he could to come to Jesus himself. Taking what little he could, do what he could to get him to the one who could heal him. That was faith.

In the Gospel Luke, Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should pray and not give up. He said, “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about people. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

For some time, he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about people, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming.’”

And Jesus said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they will get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”¹¹

And again Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; they who seek find; and they who knock, the door will be opened.”¹²

The question before us this morning is “What do we want Jesus to do for us?”

⁷ Mark 7:24-26

⁸ Mark 7:32

⁹ Mark 8:22

¹⁰ Mark 9:24

¹¹ Luke 18:1-8

¹² Matthew 7:7-8

If the evidence shows that maybe taking some sort of first steps on our own might be the mustard seed sized faith we need to bring, what first steps could we take?

Could we trust Jesus to do the rest?

What if we don't even know what we want?

Could we trust that the Holy Spirit that lives within us knows better than we do?

So in closing, may we believe that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah who has come to free us of our blindness. May we know deep in our hearts that Jesus sees us, hears us, and wants to do what we ask of him. And may we take steps of faith that bring us closer to Jesus each and every day.