

**Sunday, October 27, 2024**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 25B)**

Mark 10.46-52

*The Rev. Michael K. Fincher*

*Service Live Streamed at:*

<https://www.facebook.com/stgregoryslongbeach/videos/1078844613960248>

*(Sermon begins at about 16:00)*

**“What Do You Want Me To Do For You?”**

In recent weeks, our journey through the Gospel according to Mark has allowed us to accompany Jesus and his disciples on their trek from Galilee to Jerusalem. What will prove to be Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem. Very shortly, in a matter days, Jesus will make his triumphal journey into that city, where he will be hailed as King. The events we have come to know as Palm Sunday. The beginning of Jesus’ Passion, leading to his death and ultimately to his resurrection.

Knowing what awaits him, Jesus takes the opportunity throughout this journey to prepare his disciples. He has told them three times what will happen. Although, they do not quite seem to get it. But then again, who would—who could—fully comprehend such horrific news? They are, understandably, in denial. And yet, Jesus perseveres. Throughout the journey he continues to teach them about what it means to be his followers. Preparing them to take up the mantle of his mission and ministry once he has departed.

On the surface, what we hear in today’s Gospel is just another story of Jesus healing a blind man. We’ve heard so many stories of Jesus healing those who were infirmed. Including other stories of giving sight to the blind. In many ways, it is just more of the same. And yet, occurring where it does, this story contains a deeper meaning, has a deeper significance. You see, today’s Gospel reading is the final story before Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. As such, it is a transition. A gateway, if you will, to what is to happen once Jesus enters the gates of Jerusalem. Before Jesus, through his resurrection, enters the gates of heaven. While there are a few more lessons before that actually happens, today’s story of the healing of Bartimaeus serves as a summary of Jesus’ teachings thus far and provides insight into what is to come. Not for Jesus, but for those who follow him.

Let’s dissect the story and gain some insight into just what we can learn from this poor, blind beggar.

As they leave Jericho on the final leg of their trip to Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples encounter Bartimaeus, sitting on the side of the road. When he is told that Jesus is approaching, he shouts “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Demonstrating insight into just who Jesus is. Son of David being one term, one title, used for the long-awaited Messiah. Reference to the conventional understanding that the true Messiah would be a great leader in the model of King David. How he knows Jesus is the Messiah, we do not know. Undoubtedly, he has heard stories of Jesus’ teachings, of his healings. Even though he has never met him before, he is able to put it all together and, despite his blindness, he is able to see who Jesus is. Or,

perhaps, he is able to see who Jesus is because of his blindness. We know, after all, that when a person is impaired in one of the senses, some or all of the others are heightened. Perhaps Bartimaeus' physical blindness was compensated for by being able to see in ways others could not.

We hear that Bartimaeus is persistent in trying to get Jesus' attention. When others in the crowd attempt to silence him, he is all the more persistent, crying even louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" He is so certain in his knowledge of who Jesus is, in his certainty that if anyone can provide what he desires, it is Jesus. In his persistence, Bartimaeus demonstrates what true faith looks like. He also demonstrates great courage in defying pressure from those around him and boldly crying out in spite of them. In boldly speaking his truth despite what others may think. This is true faith.

Jesus recognizes Bartimaeus' faith. He stops and has his disciples bring Bartimaeus to him. In a seemingly odd gesture, Bartimaeus throws off his cloak and eagerly goes to Jesus. Whereupon Jesus asks him "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus does not presume to know what Bartimaeus wants or needs. He does not offer him food. He does not offer him money. He does not offer to heal him. Rather, he meets Bartimaeus where he is in this moment, asking, "What do you want me to do for you?" And Bartimaeus boldly responds, "My teacher, let me see again." And, of course, that is what happens. Bartimaeus' sight is restored.

There is so much profound symbolism in these few verses. First, is in the fact that Jesus calls Bartimaeus to come to him, as opposed to Jesus going over to Bartimaeus. As a poor, blind beggar, Bartimaeus is, by virtue of his poverty and his impairment, on the margins of society. Relegated to sitting on the sidelines while life continues, passing him by. Symbolized by the fact that Bartimaeus is sitting by the side of the road, "watching" the action, but not able to be a part of it. Until now. By bringing him from the side of the road to him, Jesus is inviting Bartimaeus to leave the margins he has been relegated to and to join him. Signifying that in Jesus, all are welcomed, regardless of who they are. Even those who are on the margins of society. Being welcomed from the margins signifying an invitation to a new way of life in Jesus.

The second symbol of this new life that Bartimaeus enters into is his throwing off his cloak as he gets up to go to Jesus. A sign of him leaving his old way of life behind and embracing a new way of life. An interesting counterpoint to the story of the rich young man whom Jesus told to sell all he had in order to follow him. The rich man who was unable to give up his vast possessions. And yet, here, a poor beggar willingly tosses aside what was probably the one possession he has other than the clothes on his back. Willingly, enthusiastically, embracing the prospect of a new life.

Bartimaeus fully embraces the new life that he has received. In the act of healing, Jesus says to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." But Bartimaeus does not go, as had so many others whom Jesus had healed. "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way." In gratitude, in faith, he is willing to give himself fully to service to Jesus and his ministry. Even following him to Jerusalem as the newest of Jesus' disciples. Firmly grasping the lesson of servant ministry the disciples had not yet been able to.

In many ways, Bartimaeus is what Jesus' disciples are not. At least, what they have not been thus far. During the long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus has been trying to help the disciples to see just who he is. And in turn, to see what it means for them to follow him. Most notably that while he is the Messiah, he is not one who comes as a great warrior king expecting to be served, but rather as one who serves. Jesus explains this to the disciples three times, and three times the disciples fail to see. And yet, here, on the eve of arriving in Jerusalem—on the eve of what will be the greatest actions of his servant ministry—an ideal disciple presents himself: Bartimaeus. Even though he is blind, he sees who Jesus is far better than those who have been with him for three years, boldly crying out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Even in his physical blindness, Bartimaeus exhibits profound spiritual sight. He sees and recognizes Jesus as the Son of David, as the true Messiah. He recognizes a messiahship characterized by mercy, demonstrated by service to those in need, demonstrated by welcoming of all who are cast to the margins, demonstrated by healing of those who are suffering. Furthermore, Bartimaeus is a blind beggar who is able to do what the rich young man was not able to do: to leave his former life and selflessly follow Jesus.

As I noted earlier, the story of the healing of Bartimaeus serves as a gateway of sorts. Not just in terms of where it occurs in Mark's Gospel, serving as a summation of the previous portion even as it transitions through another gate, the gate to Jerusalem, to the event of Jesus' Passion and what follows. The events that will completely reshape what it means to be followers not of Jesus the itinerant preacher and healer, but Jesus the Risen Christ.

Three times on the journey to Jerusalem, Jesus foretold what will happen to him: his suffering, death, and resurrection. As Jesus prepares to actually enter the gates of Jerusalem, this gateway story of what he did for Bartimaeus foreshadows what his death and resurrection will do for all who follow him.

In Bartimaeus calling out to Jesus on the road, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" we see who Jesus truly is: the Son of David, the Messiah. We also see that this Messiah is first and foremost about mercy.

In Bartimaeus boldly and repeatedly calling out to Jesus, despite attempts by others to silence him, we see that we are to likewise have the courage to call out to Jesus in our times of need. And that in all we do, we are to boldly proclaim who Jesus is.

In Jesus calling Bartimaeus to come to him, we see that he invites each and every one of us to come to him in our own need. Even those who are or who consider themselves to be on the margins. For with Jesus, there are no margins. None need stay by the side of the road. All are welcome to join him on the road, on the way that leads to eternal life.

In Jesus asking Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" we see that Jesus meets us where we are. That Jesus asks each of us what we need in this moment to help us live more fully into who God has created and calls us to be.

In Jesus healing Bartimaeus, we see the assurance of his healing power for each of us. No matter what the need may be. Although also recognizing that our idea of healing and his might

differ. But that the healing we receive is the healing we truly need, even if not readily apparent in the moment.

In Jesus restoring Bartimaeus' sight, we see that in him, we are able to see with new eyes. We are able to see anew who he is, who we are, and to see the path he invites us to walk with him.

In our lives of faith, we are always in search of the truth. Truth that sometimes we are blind to for a variety of reasons personal to each of us. We all come to this place, like Bartimaeus, each with the same request, "My teacher, let me see again." Uttering those words is a profound act of faith. Knowing, that Jesus will respond, "Go; your faith has made you well."