

## **Meeting Bartimaeus and Jesus** **October 24, 2021**

Today, for my sermon, I'd like to do a kind of contemplative exercise. We'll try to place ourselves inside a Bible story.

Take a moment to get comfortable. I'd recommend you put your feet flat on the floor. Scoot yourself backwards on the seat so that your back is against the back of the pew. Sit up straight. Find a comfortable position for your hands – folded in your lap, or one on each leg.

Finally, close your eyes. Take a deep breath in... and let it out.

Imagine that you are no longer sitting in St. Gabriel's. You are standing in the Middle East in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. You are in an ancient city; there is a wide dirt road in front of you, and you are leaning with your back against a building. The building you're leaning on is made out of baked clay, like stucco, and you can feel the rough, scratchy surface on your back through your top.

It's morning. The sun is shining brightly; the sky is a hazy grayish blue; and the air is still cool with the morning chill. The road you're standing next to is dusty and dry, and you can smell the dust, taste it on your tongue. All around you are sounds of the city. People talk as they walk past – haggling over the price of goods, gossiping about other families; kids are running and yelling to one another as they play.

Down the road is a marketplace, and you can smell the delicious aroma of cooked meat and fresh, sweet spices. Occasionally, someone leads a camel or some sheep down the road, and you can smell the musky, earthy stink of the animals.

Next to you is a poor beggar, an old man who holds a wooden bowl that has two coins he put in himself. He shakes the bowl to clink the coins, in an effort to catch someone's attention. Around his head, covering his eyes, is a ragged band of cloth, and he has a cloak wrapped around his shoulder to keep warm in the cool morning air.

You take all this in as you stand, leaning against that scratch building. Then, you notice the noise of people talking grows louder. You look to your left and see a large crowd moving down the street. Everyone is talking excitedly. Some people at the front of the crowd are walking backwards, trying to see someone in the midst of the group. There's a sense of excitement and awe. Some people are whispering to one another, "It's Jesus! Where is he going? Is he leaving already?"

As the crowd gets closer, you see towards the front a man who walks with an air of authority... but also tenderness. This must be the man Jesus. You're entranced by him, and you hope he keeps walking towards you so that you can get a better view of him. But then, out of nowhere, "Jesus! Son of David!" The blind beggar next to you is screaming his head off. "Have mercy on me!"

Your trance is broken. You feel frustrated, angry even, that this beggar is yelling in this magical, sacred moment. You can see other people in the crowd are grumpy too. Some shoot him dirty looks (knowing that he can't see them). Others turn to this beggar and hiss at him, "Be quiet!" But the beggar keeps on yelling, "Son of David! Have mercy on me!"

You hear some murmuring in the crowd, and then a man from the crowd, someone who was walking near Jesus, emerges and stand in front of the blind man. "Get up," he says brusquely. "He is calling you."

This blind beggar moves faster than you've ever seen him move. He sets down his wooden begging bowl, leaps up to his feet, whips his cloak off his back, and stands up tall with his back straight. He starts walking towards the crowd, but then the people shift and a Jesus emerges.

He says to the beggar kindly, patiently, "What do you want me to do for you?" You have to work to avoid rolling your eyes. He wants money, obviously! That's why he sits here all day, every day, clinking those coins!

But the blind man's answer surprises you. He doesn't ask for a some pennies. Instead, he says in a little more than a whisper, "Teacher, I want to see again." His voice breaks a little, and you can tell that he's on the edge of tears. The crowd, the whole street that was busy and loud a few seconds ago, is silent, holding its breath.

Jesus smiles a sad little smile and holds up his hand in front of the man's face. "Go," he says. "Your faith has saved you." Jesus lowers his hand but stays where he is. Slowly, uncertainly, the blind man brings his hands to his face. He grabs the band over his eyes and pulls it up onto his forehead. He freezes, with his eyes open, his eyes opened, and looks right into the face of Jesus, still smiling that small smile. The man collapses to his feet and begins to weep.

You feel tears in your own eyes. There is excited whispering in the crowd. But Jesus stays standing there and waits as the man composes himself. Then, leaving his cloak and his wooden bowl on the ground where he left them, the beggar walks into the crowd, hugging people and saying, "I want to come with you."

You stand there, watching all this, amazed. Then Jesus turns to you, as you stand ten feet apart. His eyes meet yours. You feel like they can see right into you. No one else is paying attention; they are talking to the once-blind man or about the blind man, pointing, laughing, jabbering. But Jesus is still, and he is staring at you.

Then he speaks, right to you. "What do you want me to do for you?"

What do you say? Keep your eyes closed; take a moment, and think about that. What do you want Jesus to do for you? You know that you are not blind; you are not a beggar. But you and I are struggle in our lives. We flounder. You and I need healing and wholeness. What is it, that you need God's help with? What do you want Jesus to do for you? Take a moment to think about that.

When you're ready, come back to the 21<sup>st</sup> century; come back to St. Gabriel's.

Thank you for taking that trip to 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine with me. I offer that because Bartimaeus is you and me. His name is included because he must have been a well-known figure in the early church.

But really, Bartimaeus is a kind of everyman (or "everydisciple"). His story is the story of every person who follows Jesus. Look at the progression that led to his discipleship.

He starts off broken. He is going through life, but he is struggling. He has heard of Jesus. He knows that Jesus is the Messiah, but (like everyone else), he misunderstands what the Messiah is here to do. "Son of David," the title Bartimaeus uses, is the title for a messiah who is going to be a military commander. But Jesus doesn't correct him. It's enough that Bartimaeus is trying his best. Bart doesn't quite understand this Jesus, but he's trying.

Bartimaeus humbly asks for Jesus' help – "Have mercy on me."

Bartimaeus is called. "Get up; he is calling you." To his credit, the blind man responds; he springs up.

Bartimaeus has an encounter with Jesus, articulates a deep need.

And then Bartimaeus is healed.

And finally, after being transformed, Bartimaeus follows Jesus. He joins the Way, which was the name of the Christian movement before it was "Christianity."

You and I and every follower of Jesus has been through something like this story. And we go through over and over, and we struggle and turn to God for help again and again.

So if we are Bartimaeus, then that question is, what needs healing in your life right now?

- Maybe it is a physical ailment
- Maybe it's a broken relationship
- Maybe it's an internal struggle you're going through
- Maybe it's a sense of fear or sorrow or anxiety

What can Jesus do for you?

Bartimaeus gives us an example. And to be fair, Jesus doesn't always respond to us like he did to Bartimaeus. But even if Jesus doesn't give us exactly what we're asking for, there can still be healing, transformation. And after that transformation, we respond to a renewed call to follow this rabbi from Galilee.

Amen.