

## What Can Jesus Do for You?

A sermon delivered by the Rev. Roger Scott Powers  
at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque,  
on Sunday, October 24, 2021.

Mark 10:46-52

In this morning's reading from Mark, we join Jesus and his disciples as they depart the city of Jericho and continue their journey toward Jerusalem, about twenty miles to the southwest. A great crowd was with them. There was excitement in the air. Jesus' next stop was Jerusalem! His entry into that city would be the momentous event that we celebrate each year on Palm Sunday.

On the outskirts of Jericho, by the side of the road, sat a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. He could hear the people approaching – the sound of their feet walking on the road, their voices raised in many separate but simultaneous conversations. He couldn't follow all that was being said, but he was able to make out enough to realize that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was coming down the road.

Bartimaeus had heard of this man Jesus, of how he had healed others. Jesus had made the lame walk and the deaf hear. He had even given sight to others who were blind. Jesus was truly a miracle worker. He might even be the Messiah whom God had promised!

This was Bartimaeus' chance! If he could just get Jesus' attention, Jesus would heal him of his blindness. He was sure of it! But the crowd was so large and loud! How would he ever get noticed? He began to shout out in the general direction of the approaching crowd: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many in the crowd tried to silence him. Who did this blind beggar think he was? What business did he have calling out like

that, trying to get Jesus' attention? As they walked by him, they sternly ordered him to be quiet. "Jesus can't be bothered by the likes of you! He's busy! He's on a very important journey. He's on his way to Jerusalem. This isn't a good time!"

But Bartimaeus would not be dissuaded. He had to get Jesus' attention. He was determined to speak to him. Jesus was his only hope for regaining his sight. He cried out even more loudly, at the top of his lungs, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Then, Jesus heard his cry and stopped. The crowd around him stopped, too. And Jesus said, "Call him here." At that, members of the crowd called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." Bartimaeus could hardly believe his ears! Jesus had heard his cries! He and the crowd had actually stopped—for him! Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, sprang up, and made his way to Jesus, guided to him by members of the crowd.

Bartimaeus finally stood face to face with Jesus, the Son of David, and Jesus asked him: "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus said, "My teacher, let me see again." And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

The story of Bartimaeus is the story of a man on the margins of society. Poor and blind, he had little to no social status in first-century Palestinian society. He had been pushed to the periphery of society, pushed to the outskirts of the city, left to beg at the side of the road. But when Jesus came near, Bartimaeus found his voice and cried out for Jesus' help. There was one thing he wanted more than anything else. He wanted to regain his sight. So, even when the crowd told him to be quiet, he would not be silenced. He was loud and persistent. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus heard his cry and his sight was restored.

Jesus' question to Bartimaeus -- "What do you want me to do for you?" -- you may recall from earlier in this chapter is the same question Jesus asked of his disciples James and John, the sons of

Zebedee, after they said that they wanted Jesus to do whatever they asked of him. But they weren't seeking healing and wholeness. They were seeking honor and glory, power and prestige. In the end, when Jesus was triumphant, when he was glorified, they wanted to be seated beside him, one at his right hand and one at his left. James and John weren't satisfied just being among Jesus' inner circle of twelve disciples. They wanted to secure seats of honor as Jesus' top disciples. Bartimaeus, by contrast, simply wanted to see again. He desperately wanted his sight restored.

The story of Bartimaeus makes me think of people in our own day who are poor and in need and are also crying out for mercy. Asylum seekers and refugees who have fled from their home countries and left everything behind in order to seek safe haven somewhere else—anywhere else. Women with unwanted pregnancies, who seek abortion care only to find it less and less accessible. People coming out of prison who have paid their debt to society and are trying to start their lives over again, but need a good job and a decent place to live. People who have lost their jobs, their homes, their friends and family, because of mental illness or addiction and can't find the support they need to heal or at least to better cope with their circumstances.

Do we try to silence them as the crowd around Jesus tried to silence Bartimaeus? Do we try not to see them at all? Do we ignore them? Do we blame them for their circumstances? Or do we follow Jesus' lead and show them mercy, show them compassion, show them the love of God that we have experienced through Jesus Christ?

Jesus' question to Bartimaeus, and to James and John – "What do you want me to do for you?" – is a question that could be posed to each one of us here today: What do *you* want from Jesus? What do you want more than anything else in the world? If you could ask Jesus to do just one thing for you, what would it be?

Perhaps you want to be healed of an illness. Or maybe you want to be set free from an addiction. Perhaps you long for reconciliation with a friend or family member with whom you've been in conflict. Or maybe you simply want to see a more just and peaceful world.

Whatever it is that any of us wants from Jesus, we need to ask for it. We would do well to follow Bartimaeus' example – to be bold and persistent in asking for it, and not to be dissuaded by others who would try to silence us. If it's healing we want, we need to cry out for it regardless of what the medical community may say are the most likely outcomes. If it's recovery from addiction we want, we need to cry out for it against the din of voices that would have us continue to feed our addiction. If it's reconciliation we want, we need to cry out for it loudly enough to drown out the voices that tell us what we really should want is revenge and retribution. If it's peace we want, we need to cry out for it over against the haters and warmongers who would try to silence us by accusing us of being weak, or naïve, or unpatriotic.

Will we always get what we ask for? No. Will we sometimes get what we ask for? Quite possibly, yes. There are no guarantees when we pray that our prayers will be answered in the way that we would like them to be. Nevertheless, prayer can never hurt a situation. It can only help.

When we are faced with a situation and wonder what we can do about it, praying about it is something we can always do. "Pray as if everything depends on God, and work as if everything depends on you." Prayer should never be an excuse for inaction on our part. We need to do whatever we can to address the situation we are particularly concerned about at the same time that we ask for God's help with the matter.

How do we pray? There are many ways. One actually comes from this story of Bartimaeus. His cries to Jesus evolved into what is known as the Jesus Prayer or the Prayer of the Heart: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." In the Eastern Orthodox

branch of Christianity these words are often prayed repetitively, over and over again, as a sort of mantra focusing one's entire being on Jesus. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me."

The Jesus scholar, Marcus Borg, offers a modified form of the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world; fill my mind with your peace, and my heart with your love." I like this version a little better and have found this prayer to be especially helpful and meaningful to me, particularly in a violent and hate-filled world. Sometimes I will pray this brief prayer repetitively as I go to sleep at night or to calm myself in a stressful situation. "Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world; fill my mind with your peace, and my heart with your love." "Lord Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world; fill my mind with your peace, and my heart with your love."

The story of Bartimaeus encourages us to bring our deepest desires, our greatest needs, to Jesus, and to be bold and persistent in prayer. Moreover, Bartimaeus' cries offer us a model for prayer that has come down to us through the centuries -- the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us all, we pray. Amen.