

Sermon for Proper 25(B)
Year B

[RCL] Psalm 34:1-8, (19-22); Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was a nobody. He wasn't just any nobody he was a nobody among the nobodies. People often walked past Bartimaeus and at best they thought of the blind beggar as a nuisance. Day in and day out Bartimaeus would make his way to his familiar spot. Feeling his way along the crowded streets of Jericho, Bartimaeus was invisible to the people who hustled by on the way to something glamorous and important.

You see Jericho wasn't just any city, Jericho was a city for the important people, the well-to-do. Herod had his winter palace there and all the rich Roman families spent their winters in Jericho. Jericho was an oasis, a destination city. You couldn't get to Jerusalem without passing through Jericho so anyone who wanted to be seen had to have an address in Jericho.

So every morning Bartimaeus made his way to the Jericho Road, knowing that the rich people, the military and the important people had to pass by on their way. Jericho Road was the place to be if you were a blind beggar. But even on the main road Bartimaeus was invisible. Occasionally someone would drop a copper penny or two in his bowl so that he could eat for the day. But deep down in his heart Bartimaeus knew he was someone. He knew that God's love for him was deeper than his blindness. He was certain that even though people tried not to see him, God saw him and that was all that mattered.

Then something happened that changed Bartimaeus' life forever. He heard that the Rabbi name Jesus was in Jericho. Rabbi Jesus had been preaching and large crowds of people gathered to hear him but Bartimaeus couldn't get close. He had heard about Jesus, whispers here and there that Jesus could perform miracles, that he cured the sick and preached about God's love.

Bartimaeus decided this was his chance, this was his time. Jesus was passing by and he mustered every ounce of strength he had and shouted "Jesus, son of David have mercy on me!" The good people following Jesus, even his disciples, told Bartimaeus to be quiet but he yelled all the louder; "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

It happened almost too quickly. The people parted and someone grabbed Bartimaeus' hand and suddenly he was kneeling before Jesus. This man who for most of his life was invisible, this man who no one recognized, this nobody was standing before of Jesus. The words tumbled out of his mouth faster than his brain could process them; "My teacher, let me see again." And with just seven words Bartimaeus could see!

The story of Bartimaeus is often held up as one of the great healing miracles of Jesus. In the gospels Jesus transforms the lives of those on the margins and draws them more and more into the center. But what if we saw this story as the crowd, the followers of Jesus, being blind and not Bartimaeus.

The crowd in our gospel saw this blind beggar as annoyance, disturbing Jesus as he preached God's kingdom. Bartimaeus was an disturbance, a distraction from the 'way things are done', but Jesus skillfully moves him from the sidelines, recognizes his humanity and dignity and draws him closer to the center.

Bartimaeus wasn't blind where it really mattered. Bartimaeus had a perfect vision of what it meant to be a beloved child of God. Not only did he know that he was a beloved child of God he insisted on being treated like a beloved child of God. Not even the crowd could hold him back and Jesus recognizes him for his bravery.

We as the church can quickly become like the crowd; blind to the needs of those sitting right outside our doors. The Bartimaeus's of our day do not necessarily sit with a bowl begging and blind, they are the ones in greatest need reaching out along the Jericho road leading into our church. Like in our gospel we, the crowd, are the ones in need of having our sight restored, our blindness healed, our vision focused.

If we listen hard enough and look long enough we hear the cries of Bartimaeus still. Listen...

Jesus, son of David have mercy on us....

- We are the ones who are blinded by a world who deems them of no account.
- We are those who are blinded by a society that too often measures worth by the things we own and the cars we drive.
- We are the ones who have been told time and again that we are of no value that we are outside the realm of God's love and peace.
- We are the ones blinded by the pain of grief and loss, broken relationships and failed dreams.
- We are the ones blinded by a disease and crippled by a diagnosis.
- We are the ones blinded by the word illegal and immigrant and refugee.

How do we respond to the many Bartimaeus's in our own time? We show them to Jesus.

Notice in the gospel the crowd is the first miracle of healing. The crowd is given their sight and actually sees Bartimaeus. And once their blindness is cured the crowd didn't pray for Bartimaeus, they didn't form a committee, or call a meeting or even have a theological discussion on the merits of Bartimaeus. The crowd saw him and showed him to Jesus and let Jesus do the rest.

The same is true for us. We are called as followers of Jesus to first be healed of our blindness so that we can see clearly to invite others to share in Christ's healing.

As Bishop Michael Curry said to the Episcopal Church gathered in Utah this past June; "Put Jesus up front. Put sharing that good news in front. Put forming our people as followers of Jesus – as disciples for real – at the front. And then put inspiring and enabling them to serve in their personal lives, and for us to witness in the public square in the front. That's the church; that's the movement."

Once we as the church recognize those on the margins, those sitting on the sidelines, our faith demands that we show them Jesus and together be healed.

Because if you notice at the end of the Gospel story Bartimaeus didn't go off and found "The Society for the Formerly Blind of Jericho", he didn't go dancing through the streets shouting from the rafters, he "regained his sight and followed in the way."

In the end as Christians that is all that we can do once our vision has been restored and blindness cured, follow in the way of Jesus.

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see. Amen.

Written by The Rev. Deon Johnson

The Rev. Deon Johnson has served as Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Brighton, MI for the last nine years. A Liturgical Consultant, Deon specializes in helping communities revision their worship spaces to better reflect both their needs and the theology of welcome found in the Eucharist. In his spare time Deon enjoys working on websites and is an avid photographer.

Published by the Office of Mission Communications of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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