

Just Ask

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Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho; and as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude, Bartimae'us, a blind beggar, the son of Timae'us, was sitting by the roadside.

⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you."

⁵⁰ And throwing off his mantle he sprang up and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Master, let me receive my sight."

⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way.

"Go your way; your faith has made you well."

Mark 10:52a

Words of Jesus to someone called Bartimaeus.

What do we know about Bartimaeus?

We don't even know his proper name, for bar-Timaeus simply means that he was the son of Timaeus.

This we do know:

He was blind.

He was a beggar.

He lived and begged in the city of Jericho, an oasis that was the Palm Springs of Judea.

But is there anything else we know about him?

Well, we know that he was persistent. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!"

He was not happy to be a blind beggar.

He was so unhappy that when he cried out and was put down by his betters who told him to be quiet, that didn't stop him for a moment.

He cried again and again: "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Mercy?

What is mercy to a blind beggar?

A few shekels?

Taking him off the streets and giving him shelter?

A welfare program?

Mercy?

What kind of mercy does he need?

And what driving need led him to cry out that way?

It's a hard question to answer -- looking at the drama as if we were spectators.

Mark didn't mean for it to be that way.

Mark doesn't want us to look upon this drama, this miracle of receiving sight, as interested spectators.

mark wants us to see ourselves as one of the participants.

Which do you suppose?

One of the crowd?

Or as Jesus?

Or as the beggar?

You already know the answer.

Can you visualize yourself as the poor, blind, unnamed beggar, sitting by the roadside?

I find it hard to do.

Then again, how much more do you or I know than the blind beggar knew?

He didn't know what Jesus looked like.

We don't either.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul are skimpy on details about Jesus' looks.

If Jesus came again, we still wouldn't recognize him. Well, what would he look like?

Blind Bartimaeus had never heard Jesus' voice.

That would be a help.

Have you?

Neither Jesus nor the disciples are very helpful about how to discern the differences between voices between God's voice or the voices of our own inclinations and desires.

All they suggest is to wait to see the results.
Blind Bartimaeus is starting to make more sense.

I haven't seen or heard anymore than he has.

How about you?

Perhaps it is possible to empathize and understand Bartimaeus at some level.

Blindness can describe more than a physical disability.

There are people who are blind to the meaning in life.

People who can't discern how God can be at work.

People who don't understand why their lives have suddenly taken a harsh and brutal turn – and they are being swept away.

People who can't live with a world rushing headlong to destruction – who can't see where it will all end.

There are many who cannot see Jesus in our day – any more than Bartimaeus could see Jesus!

The crowd doesn't help either....

"Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent."

"Hey, how come some people seem to get along well in life and I just keep struggling along?"

“Shhhhhh.”

“Why must I get up to go to a job I don't even really enjoy?”

“Hush.”

"Why is my life in tatters -- can't get along with my parents, my brother, my sister?"

“Be quiet.”

“What am I going to be, when I grow up?”

Silence.

“When will I be able to see?”

Can you begin to understand what it took for Bartimaeus to call out that day?

Jesus stopped, turned, and said: "What do you want me to do for you?"

"What do you want me to do for you?"

Can you imagine what it took for Bartimaeus to cry out that way?

And now the moment has arrived.

“What do you want?”

How must he have felt in that moment?

How do we feel in that moment?

We’ve called out to Jesus for mercy and forgiveness.

He asks what we want him to do for us.

"Master, let me receive my sight."

Sounds easy?

It’s not!

Why?

Why is it hard for a blind man to ask for sight?

Why is it hard for us to ask for what we really want and need the most?

We have been taught to pray for what is proper, to circle all around the issue, to pray prayers that are so general and so passive.

Jesus is aggressive in prayer: "Give us this day!" "Deliver us from evil!" "Let this cup pass."

Why do we, who are sick, find it so hard to ask for healing?

Might we be afraid that the answer will be no?

Maybe it is better sometimes not to know - when to ask for the best means facing the worst: that no healing will come.

Afraid that God will fail to hear us no matter how loud we cry.

Jesus answered Bartimaeus: "Go your way; your faith has made you well."

What has made him well?

Wasn't it Jesus who made him well?

Jesus said: "Your faith has made you well."

What does that mean?

Does it mean that all we have to do is be a good Christian and believe the right things and everything will be okay? That God takes care of the upright?

"Your faith has made you well."

What does that say?

Take a look at some others whose faith made them well.

One was a leper, "unclean," an outcast.

Another was a centurion, a Roman, one of the oppressors, the occupying army, the secret police.

There was a woman with a hemorrhage who touched Jesus and "defiled" him.

Jarius, a "ruler," one of the establishment, those who had the least time for Jesus.

Finally Bartimaeus, crying "Son of David."

What did all these whose faith made them well have in common?

Certainly not belief or doctrine.

Some were Jews and some pagans; some knew quite a lot about Jesus and some nothing at all.

The only thing they had in common was that they asked.

They did not just ask, they cried out. And when they were told to shut up, they cried out again.

They asked the impossible. They knew Jesus had what they needed and they demanded it from him.

For them, faith was not gentle and long-suffering, faith was persistent, aggressive, bold, brassy and demanding.

And Jesus heard and turned around. "Your faith has made you well."

Just ask.

It is a paradox, isn't it? Healing faith is the ability to ask for the one thing you want so much that you are scared to death to ask for it.

Even to say it, even to think it, is to face the painful possibility that the answer might be no.

Sometimes that is just too hard; to risk, to gamble everything. It is easier to give in, to be fatalistic, to go mourning to your grave.

We do that all the time.

We allow our needs - our blindness, our illnesses of body and mind and spirit, to control us. We feel conspired against, sold out, helpless, driven by fate, lost and alone. And it is hard to cry out, to spring up, and to ask.

Because we might hear, "What do want me to do for you?"

Do we ask, in spite of all odds, ask the impossible?

Do we say: "I choose to live as a well, whole, healed person"?

Knowing that the answer might be "No!"

Maybe that's where healing starts:

We hit bottom: and find God there too.

Jesus said, "Go your way, you are well," and it was so.

Can you imagine that blind man?

He knew everything by touch.

Now he could see what he had touched.

What a magical mystery tour it would be.

I imagine Bartimaeus running down the streets, hugging people, staring at counters of food, clothes.

At the sky, at his feet.

"Go your way" – were I him I would be all over the place.

Not Bartimaeus.

Listen to the last line of the scripture.

"And immediately Bartimaeus received his sight and followed Jesus on the way."

"Go your way" ends up following Jesus on the way – the way that leads to the cross.

So it ever is, for those whose lives, whose spirits are healed – whether their bodies are healed or not.

If you call upon him, Jesus will hear you.

We are on that roadside where Bartimaeus was!

Jesus does pass by our lives.

Says to all of us: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Will we answer him?

And follow where our answer leads us?

Wherever our answer leads us?

Will we?

Amen