

Sunday Lesson – October 24, 2021

GOSPEL: Mark 10: 46-52

"The Blind Beggar"

Context



"The story of Blind Bartimaeus occurs in the Gospel of Mark and concerns the healing of a blind beggar called Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. A parallel account mentions two blind men (Matthew 20:30), but Mark focuses on the one who was no doubt familiar to his readers. On his way out of Jericho, Jesus was surrounded by a huge crowd, when, from the roadside, Bartimaeus called out to Him to be healed. The events that follow tell us something profound about God's nature and shed light on the type of faith and prayer that are pleasing to God."

(Excerpts from gotquestions.org/blind-Bartimaeus.html)

Insight

"In the final verse, Jesus names *faith* as what impels Bartimaeus. The rest of the story shows us what that faith is. Bartimaeus's faith is not about reciting the correct confession or subscribing to certain dogmas. It is his unrelenting conviction that Jesus can and will rescue him from his need. We see this faith in what Bartimaeus does:

- *He grasps who Jesus is.*
- *He persists despite hindrances.*
- *He expects a transformation.*
- *He asks for the right thing.*

(Excerpts from workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-30-2/commentary-on-mark-1046-52-2)

Gospel Reading

"They spent some time in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town, trailed by his disciples and a parade of people, a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road. When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene

was passing by, he began to cry out, "Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!" Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder, "Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped in his tracks. "Call him over." They called him. "It's your lucky day! Get up! He's calling you to come!" Throwing off his coat, he was on his feet at once and came to Jesus. Jesus said, "What can I do for you?" The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "On your way," said Jesus. "Your faith has saved and healed you." In that very instant he recovered his sight and followed Jesus down the road." The Message

What It Could Mean?

"In this case, Jesus is leaving Jericho, and a group of people accompanies him (10:46). "Being on the road" serves as a literary motif to introduce Bartimaeus, a blind man who sits on the sideway. The description of such a character is straightforward: unable to see and begging for money, Bartimaeus represents the poorest among the poor.

Although the narrative does not offer more details, the reader realizes that he is a liminal character: outside of the city, outside of the path, outside of the light, and outside of the economy, Bartimaeus, like many beneficiaries of Jesus' healing, embodies the effects of social exclusion. We should also keep in mind that such a position most likely kept Bartimaeus from having a household. Although he is the "son of," men in his situation would not be able to form a family, work to sustain himself and his dependents, or fulfill some obligations proper to civic and religious life.

The narrative builds some tension using the crowd as an obstacle of communication between Jesus the healer and Bartimaeus the healed. Although the multitude charges the man to be quiet, such an injunction only causes the blind man to renew his proclamation of Jesus as the son of David (10:47-48). Bartimaeus, then, confesses his faith in Jesus before the

healing. Jesus' final words (10:52) function as an approval of the blind man's confession.

The differences between both healings are essential: not only do they differ in who takes the initiative or the role of the crowd, but the first episode also has a haptic component (touching becomes an essential part of the healing), while in the second, the word becomes the medicine itself. Furthermore, in this passage, Jesus asks the beggar about his needs, while in the first one, there is no dialogue about the blind man's wishes. There is no Christological confession in the first one, whereas Bartimaeus confesses Jesus as the son of David from the start.

In the case of Bartimaeus, we encounter a seemingly insignificant detail that colors the theology of discipleship so prominent in Mark 10. In my commentary to the previous passage (Mark 10:17-31), I suggested that the wealthy man could not become a proper disciple considering Jesus' commendation that he sold all his belongings. I also suggested that Jesus' response also implied that the sale of all the belongings probably included slaves and that such action would benefit those on the lower scale of the social strata. Bartimaeus belongs precisely to this group. Subsequently, this passage provides a contrast to the failed discipleship encounter of Jesus and the wealthy man. Such contrast I see pictured in the narrative detail that informs us that Bartimaeus leaves behind the only valued item he owns: "and he, casting away his coat, got up quickly and abruptly jumped towards Jesus" (10:50)

The cloak here is not only an aesthetic garment. For individuals living below poverty levels, the cloak is a piece that provides warmth in hostile weather conditions, a valuable piece that would allow them to sleep at night or to throw it in front of them to collect money. The garment is also a sign of status and power.

In a section of the gospel particularly invested in suggesting modes of discipleship, Bartimaeus appears as a radical disciple

that cast away his only valuable belonging. The passage ends with a compelling description of Christian discipleship built on wordplay. Whereas the miracle starts with Bartimaeus "sitting on the side of the road" (10:46), it ends with the new disciple "walking, following Jesus on the road" (10:52). This interpretative move is crucial because it provides contemporary readers a focal point beyond the healing, allowing us to steer away from ableist interpretations (admittedly present in the text) that reinforce theologies that equate faith and healing. In other words, I suggest that contemporary interpretations should focus on the blind man's disposition rather than on the blind man's condition." (*Excerpts from workingpreacher.org; Revised Common Lectionary by Luis Menéndez-Antuña*)

Readings for Further Study

- [Hebrews 11:6](#) God "rewards those who earnestly seek Him."
- [2 Samuel 7: 14-16](#) Jesus the "Son of David"
- [Psalm 34: 6; 18](#) Bartimaeus appealed to Jesus according to the revelation of God's character in the Psalms

Thought for the Day

"Pray before you worry; forgive before you become bitter; give thanks before you ask for anything; embrace change before you become stagnant; choose love before becoming hate." ~ Unknown

A Prayer

"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips." **Amen.** ~ *Psalm 63: 1-5*