St. Brendan's
Mark 10: 46-52
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"What do you want me to do for you?" This is the second time we've heard Jesus ask this question. The first time was last week when James and John tell Jesus they want him to do what they ask him to do…which is to say they want to confirm that they, James and John, will sit in the place of honor beside Jesus. This week Jesus asks the blind beggar, Bartimaeus, the same question, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* And Bartimaeus answers simply, *"My teacher, let me see again."*

Bartimaeus is the lowest of the low… …no one ranks lower than a dirty, smelly, blind beggar sitting on the side of a road. He is scum and many in the ancient world would've told you he brought his blindness on himself because of some sin he or his family had committed…a belief that was widely held in the ancient world…and yet, when Bartimaeus heard it was Jesus of Nazareth, heard because he couldn't see, he shouted out to Jesus, *Son of David, have mercy on me."* He is the only one in all of Mark who calls Jesus, Son of David, but he knows. He knows that Jesus is descended from King David because he has been paying attention …He has heard of all the healings that Jesus has done …because he has been paying attention…while no one paid any mind to him in the town or the market place he has been listening to them talk about Jesus. Maybe he has even heard the news about the blind man in Bethsaida whose sight Jesus restored.

It doesn't take long for the disciples and the rest in the crowd to turn on the blind beggar. They tell him to shut up. What right did he a blind beggar have to bother Jesus. But Bartimaeus will not be shushed…he has no one to help him and this is his chance because after all he believes Jesus can heal him…So he cries even louder, *"Son of David, have mercy on me."* When Jesus finally does hear him and calls him to come to Jesus, Bartimaeus throws off his cloak. So strong is his faith that Jesus can heal him, he wouldn't need his filthy, tattered cloak anymore.

In contrast to Bartimaeus, the disciples who have been following Jesus all this time seem to be having a hard time paying attention to what Jesus has been teaching and preaching. First, they demand Jesus give them what they asked for …status in the coming kingdom They reason that it is only fair given that they have left their families and livelihood to follow Jesus.

They want some assurance that Jesus will guarantee them their place in the power grid. Especially after all of Jesus' talk about being condemned to die. They followed Jesus because they believed he is the long-awaited savior who is going to free them from the oppression of the Romans and their poverty. I get it that they are confused and afraid but one has to wonder if they really have been listening because Jesus has made it pretty clear that he was no quid pro quo kind of guy.

Maybe it is the sound of Jesus' voice inviting Bartimaeus to come to Jesus that calms down the disciples and the crowd, the very people who have tried to shush Bartimaeus. Who knows

but suddenly they change their tune and urge Bartimaeus to go to Jesus. When Jesus restores his sight, he tells Bartimaeus his faith has made him well.

Faith…obviously we have some faith if we are sitting here today listening to a sermon, right… But truth be told, most of us are more like the disciples than we might like to admit… No matter how many times we are told or read about God's unconditional love, we don't always, like the disciples, pay attention. We get distracted by the world's demands of us. Be smart, be successful, be popular. Whatever it is, we have a choice. Bartimaeus has no choice. He has no money, no possessions, no home, and most of all has no sight…so he does pay attention.

Samuel Wells, Vicar of London's St-Martin-in-the-Fields tells a story about a young girl who like Bartimaeus has been paying attention…who has been listening for the voice of God despite the world's noise…and perhaps has heard it… whose faith is as deeply rooted in her heart as Bartimaeus's is.

Wells explains that his church is still zooming Morning Prayer even after the Pandemic. He says the one element that draws a large response is people being able to post petitions that are then read aloud in the Morning Service.

One day when he is leading, the person assisting him hands him a stack of petitions posted overnight and he reads, "For the baby I aborted: I love you despite never meeting you. I hope you're with me until I have the chance to explain why the timing wasn't right in person. Until then, I must let go xxx."

Wells says her prayer brought him to his knees. He goes on, "This child of God was wrestling with powerful feelings, memories, wonderings and she has brought all this into the divine presence. She has asked all of those of us gathered to place these poignant realities on the altar of God's grace and mercy. And embraced by the miracle of God's story, she is pleading with the Holy Spirit to make something good of it all-maybe not straightaway or even soon: but in God's good time."

Both Bartimaeus and this young girl trust in a God whose love can and will heal…no questions asked. And both have the courage and faith to call on God regardless of how they look through the eyes of the world. The disciples, on the other hand, are still distracted by the world's glittering standards of power and prestige. Sometimes we are too.

The other day Robert and I were coming back from walking our dog, Gabriel, and we saw up ahead on the main road, an animal had been struck by a car. I told Robert to take Gabriel up our drive and I would go move the animal off the road. I admit I thought it might be a dog, because it was so big, but whatever I was going to move it off the road so no one could run over it again.

As I started up the road, I heard a truck slow down and pull off the road. When I looked around behind me, I saw a young guy walking towards me. What did he want? Who was he? Why was he walking toward me. I stood there wondering what to do next. Then he said something I will never forget. "Is that your

dog?" I shook my head no and he went on, "Oh, okay. I just didn't think you should be alone if it was your dog."

With all of what is wrong in the world right now, I was brought to my knees by this stranger's kindness and willingness to stop in the middle of the day to offer to wade into grief with me…someone he didn't know and would probably never see again.

At that moment there is no question in my mind that the Holy Spirit filled me with the love of God in this young man's gesture. Standing alone on that road, I experienced God's wild, unconditional love and was reminded to pay attention, like Bartimaeus, like that young girl because God is here among us in so many ways.

In fact, the animal that had been hit was a large racoon and while it may not have been a dog, it still broke my heart to see such a lovely creature just left in the middle of the road.

I wonder what **we** would say if today Jesus asked us, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* Think about it…Our Prayers of the People are chock full of petitions…and they are heartfelt but, those petitions are usually for others. Do we dare, like the example of Bartimaeus and the young girl in London, have the faith to answer Jesus' question to us, *"What do you want me to do for you.?...* no matter how that answer might look to the world…What comes up for me is that line in St Brendan's prayer … *"Give me the faith to leave old ways and break fresh ground with you."* Amen.