

In the name of the true and living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Have mercy on me!”

The plea came from a man named Bartimaeus. A blind man. A blind *beggar*.

Now, a beggar in those days—not unlike in our own—was expected to not bother anyone. Cast well outside of the margins of polite society, beggars, were preferably not seen and certainly not heard.

It was acceptable for them to ask for alms along the side of the road, so long as they did so quietly, so long as they did so without disturbing those walking by.

But here was Bartimaeus, shouting at Jesus and his followers on the road, making his needs well known to anyone with ears to hear and naming exactly who he wanted to respond to him: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

But the crowd shushed him, they *ordered him to be quiet*. He was out of line, after all, which, whether you were one of the people on the road or beside it, was a fact you knew well.

What right did he have to call out so loudly? He should know his place: begging by the side of the road while others on it went about their busy lives, traveling to and from the market, to and from each others’ homes, to and from their places of worship.

But Bartimaeus wouldn’t be shushed. He only shouted louder. “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

And, Jesus, Son of David, heard Bartimaeus.

He heard him, but then again, so many others had heard him too. Only they ignored the noise, some scowling at the blind man, some pretending that they couldn't hear, some pretending that he didn't even exist.

But Jesus heard Bartimaeus' loud, indeed, disorderly cry for help.

"Bring him here," he told his followers.

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When I was about 10, my grandmother gave me a book that had belonged to her aunt. It was a Victorian book of etiquette for women, cloth-bound in a royal blue, the pages crisp and delicate with age.

In awe, I opened up the front cover and read the inscription from my grandmother's grandmother to her daughter, my great great Aunt Irene. It was dated 1910.

As a child I was captivated by chapters devoted to topics such as the color of clothing a woman should wear and for how long during a period of mourning. It depends, if you're wondering, just how deeply you're mourning and for whom you're mourning. There were songs to be learned and exercises considered acceptable for a young woman. And of course conversation topics to engage the mind but never to disturb the spirit.

My grandmother had loved this book as a girl. It had taught her how to properly set a table and entertain friends with the grace of someone much more well-to-do than she had ever been, daughter of Irish immigrants and later, wife of a mailman. She wanted to pass on this knowledge about the proper order of things, which had served her well, to me.

To me, a girl growing up in the 1980s and 90s, however, the trappings of polite society in 1910 seemed stifling, if not outright silly. But I also love order. And systems. And patterns and rules that say what to do and when

and how. They offer predictability in a world that would otherwise feel chaotic, don't they? I grew up in a military household, and so when I read that Bartimaeus defied the crowd, defied the rules that said he should be quiet, I shuddered a bit.

My first thought? *He could get in trouble.* Perhaps the crowd also felt that sense of rupture in the way of things. Were they rattled by something so out of the ordinary? Did they, too, feel chaos encroaching in their lives in this blind beggar's shouts?

When Jesus calls Bartimaeus to him, he does not reprimand him or remind him of his place. He does nothing to restore order, to quiet him, to put those on the road at ease by pushing back the creeping chaos.

What Jesus does next, transforms the whole situation. He asks Bartimaeus what he wants him to do. He asks him what he needs. He doesn't make presumptions. He doesn't give him some change or buy him a sandwich and get back on his way. He asks Bartimaeus to tell him, in his own words, what mercy he is shouting out for, in defiance of all social mores.

Bartimaeus wants to be healed of his blindness, he says.

And so Jesus heeds this call and gives him the sight he so desires.

Yet another miraculous healing in a long series of healings in the Gospel of Mark, but this one is a little different. This one tells the story of a man, with a name, who has the audacity to cry out for mercy, and then shout it even louder when everyone around him was telling him to keep his mouth shut. To maintain the order of the day.

I wonder if it is a coincidence that Jesus is traveling from Jericho when he encounters Bartimaeus. Jericho, that famed city that came crumbling down thanks to an unconventional tactic of God's army: shouting.

Unconventional is also what happens next, after the miracle. Bartimeus, who has cast off his cloak as well as the expectations of a blind beggar to come face to face with Jesus, moves from the side of the road, out of the margins, and right onto it. In the very same sentence in which he is healed, he also joins Jesus: “Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.”

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I keep wondering if this is a story about how to respond to our siblings on the margins of society that we would rather ignore or if it is about shedding fear and anxiety and having the audacity to ask God for mercy when we need it most and when it is least likely.

I think the answer is probably yes. The gospel demands that we hear the cry of the poor and marginalized. And it demands a certain freedom of our heart, our spirit, to know when we are being told to be quiet, when the likelihood of mercy is dim as midnight, and to shout our own need for Jesus anyway.

And so, I ask you, if you were to cry out, “Jesus, have mercy on me!” casting all concern for politeness, or worries about impropriety aside, what do you think might happen?

Do you think you, like Bartimaeus, would be ordered to *be quiet*?

Or do you think Jesus might stop in his tracks, and *call to you: “Come here. What do you want me to do for YOU?”*

And healed, restored, given all that you need, what would you do next?

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.