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“What Do You Want Me to Do for You?”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 31, 2021

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Holy Scriptures: Mark 10: 46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

What Do You Want Jesus to Do for You?

[Move from Pulpit to the Aisle between the Pews]

They came to Jericho.

As [Jesus of Nazareth] and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho,

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

The road to and from Jericho is long and dusty.

The road follows the River Jordan.

The road is steep.

Our story takes place just outside the gates of the city of Jericho.

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus is here, begging for coins, largely ignored.

Just like his neighbors who passed by,

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus most likely had four possessions to his name.

Sandals.

A garment of clothing to cover his body.

A cup or bowl.

A mantle, also called a tunic or an outer garment.

Mantles served many purposes:

 a blanket to sit upon or sleep under,

 a coat when it's cold,

 an extra layer to keep out the heat and provide shade.

Earlier in Mark 6: 8-9,

Jesus "instructed the [disciples] to take nothing but a staff for the journey

—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—

 and to wear sandals, but not a second tunic."

Point being: two tunics is one too many, but everyone needed one.

Mantles are precious and not easily forgotten or tossed aside.

Bartimaeus son of Timaeus was sitting by the roadside in the hot sun.

 Imagine his mantle providing shade, some comfort from life's harsh realities.

Take a moment to close your eyes and focus

 or simply lower your head and focus.

Imagine that you are blind Bartimaeus, the child of Timaeus.

Become Bartimaeus.

You are sitting by the roadside, alone.

It is quiet where you are.

Feel the ground.

Sense the dust,

 the sounds of the marketplace in the nearby city,

 the smells of the nearby olive trees,

 hear the flow of the River Jordan.

You hear a few footsteps,

 now you sense many, many footsteps.

A large crowd is coming, they are excited, talking, happy.

 Awe is in the air.

You catch snippets of a name:

Jesus! Jesus of Nazareth! Messiah!

You had recently learned about His name,

 His lineage from King David,

 His love for all people.

So, you grasp that Jesus is here, in Jericho!

Now the crowd arrives, filling in the space around you,

 almost stepping on your feet and hands.

You begin to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Say that, out loud, with me: *"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

The people surrounding and blocking you from seeing Jesus
sternly order you to be quiet. . .

Be quiet!

Hush!

Jesus doesn't want to see you! He wants to see me!

Stay in your place, over there by the side of the road!

Yet you cry out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Say that, out loud, even louder: *"Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

The crowd is telling you to be quiet. *Shh!*

Shout even louder! *"Jesus! Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

Jesus stood still.

God stops for you.

The Holy Spirit is waiting for you.

[Is this not the most remarkable sentence in all the Holy Scriptures?!]

Jesus stops.

He pauses to hear your voice.

He says to those around him, crowding him, pressing in,

"Call the one here."

The people around you who had told you to stifle now say,

"Take heart; get up, He is calling you."

You spring up!

You rise.

You rise.

You RISE!

Throw off your mantle.

Leave your mantle, your tunic, your only worldly possessions behind.

Go to Jesus.

Tune in to the sound of his voice, speaking only to you, directly to you.

Then Jesus says to you, "What do you want me to do for you?"

What do you want Jesus to do for you?

Express yourself to the One Who Created and Creates.
Commune with the Holy.
Communicate your need, your want, your hope.
Speak now!
Now is your chance.
Say your peace in your mind or say it out loud;
 respond from the depths of your heart or mind or body or soul.

When you are ready, open your eyes, lift your head, be totally present.

Consider what Bartimaeus son of Timaeus asked Jesus for.

The blind man said to Jesus, "My teacher let me see again."

Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well."

Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

"To be saved by God is to be made whole,
 to become as God intended one to be."
 [Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B]

Here the man who cannot see
 asks the teacher to help him to learn to see again, to be as God intended.
Here is a man who has seen with his faith
 the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth:
Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.
Yet Bartimaeus' inner eye saw the true identity of Christ.

Imagine the relief and release and rapture
 that swept through the heart of the Son of God.
Throughout the scriptures Jesus had been so frustrated
 with followers who could not see, would not see
 that the man before them is the Son of God.
Just a few days earlier, James and John had approached Jesus, asking for a favor.
He said, "*What do you want me to do for you?*"
James and John asked whether he would grant them
 to sit at his right and left side in the Kingdom of God.
Jesus said no.
Clearly God is not interested in massaging egos,
 nor in our vainglory,

nor in our deep desire to be entitled.

When Christ heard the cries of Bartimaeus, he stopped.

Jesus stopped and listened and called him forward.

Christ asked Bartimaeus the same question he'd asked his disciples,
And Bartimaeus said, "*My Teacher, let me see again.*"

Clearly God is invested in helping us to see:
to see our strengths, our gifts, our failures;
to see ourselves as we truly are;
to see one another;
to see the hopeful and the hopeless, the lost, the last, and the least.

God is making disciples,
and it's not accomplished by massaging egos or self-interests.

God is making disciples
who are all about seeing and hearing,
encouraging and inspiring, acting, behaving, following,
making a way in the crowd for the invisible to see God,
making a straight way in the desert for the refugees.

To do so is not that hard!
Anyone can serve.
Anyone.

When I was around 15 years old,
I was deeply moved by an article in the NY Times.
The article featured a photo taken in South Africa during Apartheid.
A young white American man of around 24
was surrounded by Zulu boys and girls in school uniforms.
The reporter asked the American school teacher
what he was teaching the young people.
He responded with such grace it took my breath away.
He said, "*These children are my teachers.*
Every day I learn more from them than I can ever teach."
I felt a stirring in my soul,
and my eyes were opened.
That day in my life Jesus stopped.
Christ stood still.
He called.
He asked what I wanted.
Here's what this 15-year-old wanted from Jesus:

To be a teacher who learns from his students.

What do you want Jesus to do for you?

Christ is standing still.

He is stopping for you, too.

He is calling you.

He asks, *"What do you want me to do for you?"*

How will you answer?

What do you say?

God has a way of filling gaps in lives, in communities, in nations.

Where are the gaps in your life?

 In Christ's church?

 In the city of God?

 In the world around us?

What do you need to see?

Whom do you need to encourage?

When and where do you need

 to make a way for another soul to see God,
 to see the Christ that lives in you?

What Do You Want Jesus to Do for You?

A teacher asked her class to list what they thought
 the Seven Wonders of the world should be.

Then they raised their hands and she called on them.

"The Great Wall of China!"

"The Pyramids of Egypt!"

"The Empire State Building!"

Everyone's hands were up except a child in the last row.

The teacher asked her, *"Do you have any you would like to add?"*

The girl said, *"Well, you want to know what we think are the seven wonders.*

*Here is my list: to see, to touch, to listen, to communicate,
to taste, to feel, to love."*

After Bartimaeus son of Timaeus received his sight, he followed Jesus.

Go forth, my friends.

Go on the way, giving thanks and praising God,

Testify only to what you know to be true.

And what have you seen and heard and experienced?

You know.
Words of encouragement are cosmic.
Students enlighten the teacher.
Teachers empower their students.
Wounded healers transform lives.
The lost become guides.
The broken put pieces together.
Anyone can serve.
Anyone!
So go ahead and testify.
Be.
Act.
Love.
Share that in Jesus' name the crooked places are made straight.
The blind see.
The deaf hear.
The lame walk.
The addicted are released.
The imprisoned are liberated.
The broken are made whole.
The lost become what God intends.
The dead are raised into new life.
And the Church,
 the Church takes heart, takes a stand, takes off its mantle,
 rises up and follows Jesus on the Way.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!