

The Fifth Sunday in Angels' Tide, October 24, 2021

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With Blind Beggar Bartimaeus

Mark 10:46–52

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

As [Jesus] was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 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!" (vv 46–47).

3.

What could we possibly learn from a blind beggar? This Bartimaeus is about the last person we would ask to teach us anything. He's not rich or successful. He isn't well educated or especially wise. He has no special skill or trade. He isn't popular or good looking. He has no followers, no website, no podcast, no book deal. What He does know is this: He knows how to beg. That's what he does day after day. He sits by the side of the road with his cloak in his lap and asks those who pass by for some benevolence, for alms and charity, for a coin tossed his way or whatever they can spare. He begs.

It would take a lot for us to do something like that. None of us want to be beggars. Many of us would rather die than ask for help or rely on someone else. We want to earn our way. We want to be self-sufficient. We want to be independent. Maybe it's the old Puritan work ethic still in the New England air. Maybe it's our pride and stubbornness. Maybe its embarrassment or not wanting to be a bother. Ask for help? No way! It hasn't gotten that bad yet. That would humble us for sure. To ask for help, I'd have to admit my weakness and frailty, my suffering and hurt. I'd have to admit that I *can't* do it. I'd have to admit that I'm not enough, I don't know it all, I'm struggling with life, when what I really want to say is "I'm fine, and I'll manage on my own, thank you very much!"

I bet Bartimaeus wanted to say that, too. He wanted to say it, but he didn't. He knew it wasn't true. He was blind, yes, but not that blind—not blind to his own condition, not blind to his need. He knew He couldn't do it himself. And that's exactly what we could learn from him. We could learn how to beg! We could learn to see ourselves as beggars!

We could learn to depend on the kindness and generosity of others, especially on the kindness and generosity of Jesus, the Son of David. All those long years of begging reach a climax as Jesus, the disciples, and a great crowd leave Jericho on the road to Jerusalem. That's the roadside where blind Bartimaeus sits and begs.

What does it mean to beg? In our prayers, we sometimes say "We beg You, O God" or "We beseech You," or "We implore You." Why in the world would we beg, beseech, and implore God? It's a good question. We pray like this not because of who God is but because of who we are: We are beggars. We are all beggars. After Martin Luther died in February 1546, a handwritten note was reportedly found in his pocket. It said, "We are all beggars; this is true." It's a statement about our spiritual need. Luther meant that we have nothing to give God but everything to receive from Him. We have empty hands. Our need is great. We aren't independent or self-sufficient. We can't earn our way, no matter what we do. We depend on generosity. We depend on the kindness of God.

Today we have the joy of welcoming new members into our congregation. It's no stretch to say that they're joining a community of beggars. That doesn't sound like a very good marketing strategy, but it's the truth, and they know it. No matter how much we have in this world, before God we're just a bunch of blind Bartimaeuses. We all have the same need. We're all sitting by the same roadside. We're all crying out together for the same mercy. And, I should add, we always have room for more beggars.

2.

So we all join Bartimaeus the blind beggar and sit with him. He's sitting by the road when he hears that Jesus is coming. That gets him excited. He has never met Jesus. He can't even see Him, but he has heard of Him and believes in Him. He has a simple, childlike faith. He trusts that Jesus can help him. He prays by crying out (v 47), "**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!**" It's such a little prayer. First, He calls out to the Lord, and, second, he asks for mercy. The psalms teach us to pray like this. It's also the prayer of the tax collector in the temple who is so ashamed that he can't even lift his eyes to heaven. And it's the prayer of the desperate Canaanite woman whose daughter was demonized. Lord, have mercy. This is what faith in Christ looks like. It looks like a beggar calling out for mercy!

Though we have not seen our Lord, we also believe in Him. In that way, we too are blind. We see not with our eyes but with our ears. Faith comes by hearing. This little prayer of faith is one for us to know and use. Keep it on your lips. Join Bartimaeus in praying it without ceasing. It's especially helpful when words fail us, when we can't pray, or when we don't know how to pray as we ought. The Holy Spirit puts the words of the blind beggar in our mouths: "Have mercy!"

We speak and sing this prayer so often in the liturgy: Lord, have mercy upon. Christ, have mercy upon us. Lord, have mercy upon us. *Kyrie, eleison!* In peace, let us pray to the Lord: Lord, have mercy. Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. You can pray this prayer from your chair at home, in the car, at school, even while working. You can pray it in the waiting room, in the checkout line, or while you're on hold. When you see an accident or hear of an illness or receive bad news, you can pray: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy." Learn to pray this simple prayer to Jesus and it will go with you through all of life. It will even be there in the hour of your death. Then you'll know what it is to pray like a beggar—to pray as one who depends entirely on the mercy of God.

1.

"Lord, have mercy" isn't a cry of despair. It's a cry for salvation. It may come from a beggar, but it's directed toward the Savior. It isn't tossed on the wind or thrown into the void. It rings in Jesus' ears. When Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is coming, he doesn't wallow in his beggarliness or roll around in his sorrow and sin. He simply cries out for mercy. When they rebuke him and tell him to stop, he just does it even more: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He looks to Jesus with the eyes of faith.

Even as we sit with Bartimaeus and cry out for mercy with Bartimaeus, we are invited to look where he looks. Whether our faith is as strong as his faith or our prayer as passionate as his prayer isn't the point. We have one and the same Savior. The Jesus who stopped by the side of the road, restored the blind man's sight, and saved him is the Jesus who took the road here this morning. He comes by the place where you are sitting. He brings His mercy, His charity, His benevolence. His is the name above every name. The human name of the incarnate God. He is the Son of David, the Christ, *ha-Messiach!* He is the God of all mercies who delights to show mercy to those who call upon Him.

The road Jesus followed was the road of mercy, call it Mercy Street. It led Him right past Bartimaeus, and then it led Him on to Jerusalem. In answer to the beggars' prayers for mercy, because of our great need, our Lord took His place upon the cross. The Son of David ascended His throne. He was treated worse than a beggar. He was despised and scorned. He had no beauty that we should look at Him. He was shown no mercy. He was given no charity. The mercy and generosity of God is ours at His expense.

For Jesus' blood through earth and skies
Forever, "Mercy! Mercy!" cries.

We're told that Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way, just as we are following on the same way. That's what it means to be a disciple, a student of Jesus. He leads, we follow. His road didn't end at the cross. From the cross, it continued through the dark tomb and into the light beyond. Through baptism, we were crucified with Christ. We were also raised with Him to walk in newness of life. Our feet are set on a new road. We follow a new path. He has given us beggars eyes to see Him as our Lord and our Redeemer. He gives us eyes, too, to see other beggars, those who are blind, other sufferers, and to invite them on the way. Teach them to pray like Bartimaeus, "Lord, have mercy." Point them to the Savior.

And where does the way end? It ends at the new Jerusalem. There's a final turn in the road, one last bend where the darkness ends at last and the light floods through forever. It runs into streets of gold where the cries of mercy turn into shouts of praise. So we follow on behind Jesus. We look to the journey's end, beggars though we are, praying for mercy and welcoming other beggars. Now we see in part, but soon, like Bartimaeus, we shall see face to face.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
