

Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
24 October 2021

Mark 10:46-52

A poorly dressed beggar approached a man on a taxi at a red light. He began to beg for some help and would not take “no” for an answer. Finally, the exasperated Taxi passenger said, “I don’t have money, but you can have one of my cigarettes.” The beggar replied, “I’m sort, but I don’t smoke. Smoking is bad for your health.” The man in the taxi offered, “Fine, here, someone gave me this expensive bottle of Whiskey. Take it, you look like you can use a drink.” The beggar replied, “I’m sorry, but I believe drinking is bad for your health.” Finally, the man in the taxi said, “I have this lottery ticket, which I believe is a winner. Take it and claim the price.” The beggar responded politely, “I am sorry, but gambling is bad for your emotional and spiritual health.” Finally, the man told the smelly, poorly dressed, homeless man, “Get in the taxi and come have supper with me at home. I want to show my wife what a man without bad habits looks like!”

We have a great story in our Gospel today. A blind beggar who is “out of the way,” at the roadside, begs Jesus for mercy. This is an interesting story because it is very different to the two stories we have heard in the Gospel of Mark in the last two weeks. You may recall that two weeks ago, there was a young rich man who approached Jesus as he was “On his way” and asked Jesus what he needed to do to be saved. Jesus responded, “Sell what you have and follow me.” Of course, we know that he went away very sad because he had many possessions. Then, last week we heard how James and John asked Jesus to give them the places of honor in heaven, to which Jesus responded by saying that those who wish to be first must be the servants of others.

Today, we have someone who has nothing: No possessions, no wealth, no place of honor, no respect from anyone. Whereas the characters in the stories for the last several weeks are worried about wealth, power, and position, all this poor man wants is mercy and healing. To the people of Jesus day there are great differences between the characters of those two stories and the poor beggar today: The man who has great wealth is believed to be righteous, because great wealth is seen as a gift of God to those who obey the commandments. In fact, this fellow claimed that he had followed all the commandments from his youth. The beggar today is blind, which is seen by the people as a punishment from God for sin. He is not wealthy, has no job, and is reduced to begging. In the eyes of the people of the day he is a sinner. There is also a difference between him and the apostles John and James. They belong to “the way,” which is how the movement associated with Jesus is called. The expression “to follow on the way” often means to follow Jesus, but of course, it also means to follow on a highway, a road. The beggar is out of the way, in the sense that he doesn’t belong to Jesus as a disciple, and in the sense that beggars often begged “outside” the city gates, the temple, and on the side of the highways. The purpose was to make themselves heard, without being in people’s way

necessarily. John and James are in the inner circle of Jesus, they are insiders. The beggar is an outsider, at the margins of society. He has to resort to loud cries. Whereas the two Apostles seek honor and power, all this poor man wants is a quick word with Jesus. Perhaps if Jesus were to show some mercy, he could be healed. Perhaps he too could follow Jesus on this way.

There is an interesting thing going on here with this story of the Blind Beggar. When you read Mark, you always have to wonder why he places stories where he places them. I believe this story closes a section about discipleship, which started on 8:22 and ends with this passage at 10:52. The section starts with the healing of a blind man and ends with this story of the healing of another blind man. These two stories act like a starting and closing to the section of discipleship. That section includes Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah; Jesus foretelling of his death and resurrection; the transfiguration scene; and the conversation among the Apostles as they were walking about who was the greatest, which prompted Jesus to take a small child in their midst and say, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (9:35). The section also includes a number of teachings from Jesus about the cost of discipleship (cut your hand off, prohibition against divorce...;) the story of the rich man, and then the story of James and John, seeking to be greatest. And then, we have another blind man.

In a way, I believe Mark is asking the question, "Who are the real blind men? Are the men in chapters 8 and 10 the real blind people? Or, are the Apostles, who fail to see the truth of Jesus' ministry of service, and instead seek positions of power, the real blind people?" We are told that Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside and that he was told about Jesus of Nazareth. I often wonder who told him. Certainly not the Pharisees who would want nothing to do with a sinner. Certainly not the Apostles or disciples who are trying to quiet him down. The passage does not tell us who spoke to him, but I have a theory. I believe it may have been another beggar who told Bartimaeus about who Jesus was, about his reputation as a healer, and perhaps also about some people's belief that he was the Messiah. I would like to believe that it was another beggar who told Bartimaeus about Jesus, which brings me to my favorite phrase about Evangelism. It says that Evangelism is "a beggar showing another beggar where to find bread." Whoever this person may have been, the passage tells us that it is because someone told him about Jesus that he "began to shout out and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The passage also tells us that others, disciples included, want the man to be quiet. His cries annoy them and disturb them. Jesus, on the other side, is not appalled by the man's cries and rather than shutting him up he welcomes him. Whereas some want the beggar to stop disturbing the peace, Jesus asks him "What do you want me to do for you?" He is not disgusted or repelled by the beggar's appearance or by his cries. Whereas others want Bartimaeus to remain on the periphery, Jesus calls him to himself and admires his faith. Jesus heals him and welcomes him, and we are told that the man follows Jesus "On the Way." This is a wonderful story about acceptance, restoration,

forgiveness and faith. It is by faith that this outcast accepts Jesus of Nazareth and trusts that he can heal him. Jesus in turn shows great kindness and love to reward this faith.

My friends, I wonder how we would respond if Jesus appeared in our midst today and asked us, "What do you want me to do for you?" I wonder if we would have the faith to ask for healing, forgiveness, and restoration. Week after week, Jesus enters into the story of our lives and asks us, "What do you want from me?" Week after week he becomes food and drink, and he feeds us with his word and the sacrament of his body and blood. We know where this bread of life can be found. But I wonder how many of our relatives and friends outside those doors are in desperate need of Jesus of Nazareth. I wonder how many of them are hungry and thirsty for truth, acceptance, forgiveness, and love. I wonder how many of our neighbors need what we so freely share week after week. It is up to us my friends to show these spiritual beggars where to find the bread that we, beggars in our own way, have freely found in Jesus of Nazareth.

Today I invite all of you to share this free gift of the Gospel with all the people you will come across in your lives this coming week. The world needs a Savior, and this need is ever so pressing. I pray that you will heed the call and do all in your power to introduce Jesus to a hurting world. Amen!