

Sermon Text for June 22, 2025

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Scripture Text: Mark 10:46-52

Blessed are the merciful

Take a moment and put yourself in Bartimaeus's sandals, if he was lucky enough to even have sandals. Imagine what his life was like sitting in the dust in the hot sun begging and pleading with people for a few coins to buy flatbread or a hamburger off the dollar menu. Imagine how he smelled, his clothes worn and torn too shabby even for goodwill. His beard, scraggly and unkept.

When I think of Bartimeus I am transported back to Thailand where there was a blind man who I walked past each and every day. It didn't matter or how late, he was always at his little spot, seated on a skateboard begging for alms. He sat out in the sweltering heat as thousands of people hurried by him as they lived their busy lives.

Bartimeus wasn't blind because of anything he'd done wrong, and yet he bore the burden of his blindness day in and day out, wrapped in a cloak of perpetual darkness. Like so many in our world who carry heavy burdens, no one stopped to ask him his story. Just like the man in Thailand sitting on his skateboard outside the 7-11. No one stopped. No one made eye contact. Let us be reminded that looking someone in the eye and caring how they are doing is as holy work as most of us will ever have the honour of doing.

When we take the time to notice the friend or stranger or that person we've greeted ten times during the passing of the peace but we can't remember their name, when we look them in the eye and care how they're doing and break the ice with a question, even if it's about the weather, or the Eagles then we play a tiny part in bringing about the Kingdom of God here on earth. We become cultivators of connection and community in a time where Christianity often defaults to spiritual isolationism.

Unfortunately Bartimeus received the cold shoulder instead of kindness. Perhaps some pity sprinkled. Assuredly an annoyed side eye. Some gave money to feel better about themselves or to appease the Gods and gain divine favor for their generous offering of leftover coins. But No one, knowing Jesus' reputation as a healer, came to assist Bartimeus to get to Jesus.

Knowing Bartimeus's need and his sudden proximity to healing, still no one went out of their way to help him. They were too busy living their own lives. Probably good lives with purpose and meaning and worship attendance and taking kids to activities and all the good things that fill up our google calendars until you get to the point where you have so many things that have to click and see what the extra events are. Right!

The painful reality in this story is that for whatever reason, the crowd didn't care about Bartimeus. They had no mercy for him. They were not concerned for his good. Even as swarms of people walked by him, he was alone. In many ways, the pain of Bartimaeus is the great pain of modernity. The soul-sucking experience of loneliness. The pain of isolation even in the midst of all of our connections with people; in person and online and in a million different group chats.

This is one of the great challenges of our day, a challenge which I believe we are called to take seriously for the sake of our own souls, for the sake of our neighbors and, yes, even our enemies. We are called to be cultivators of connection and belonging. In a world where people feel invisible, much like Bartimaeus, we are called to see them and love them. This is the way of Jesus. It sounds so simple, and yet it is often so difficult for so many reasons that we cannot even begin to name them all.

There is a great sadness hidden in the text. As is often the case in Biblical stories, names carry significance. The name Bartimeus means “valuable, worthy of one’s time.” We can imagine the hope that Bartimeus’s parents had in their hearts as they stared lovingly at their newborn baby and bequeathed him such a name. It was meant to be a badge of honor. A reminder of his true identity. That he was loved and valuable, worthy.

Instead it became a curse. An unfulfilled promise as he spent his days relegated to the side of the dusty road begging for scraps. He had no value. He was a welfare case with no hope of adding value to society. To the world Bartimeus was just a beggar, but the hope of the gospel is that to Jesus he was so much more. He was valuable. Jesus saw the value that others could not see.

To extend mercy means compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. The crowd had power over Bartimaeus-socially, economically and physically. Instead of using their power for good like the many Lancastrians who staged a peaceful rally this past weekend to stand up for the most vulnerable in our society, the crowd in this instance use their power to mock and shame Bartimeus.

Now, I don’t want to get too political, but I think it’s interesting to note that in our story you have a crowd of people who are following Jesus but who by their words and actions reveal that they know very little about Jesus and the type of Kingdom He is building. I think this is a warning to us as the Church. We cannot faithfully follow Jesus while ignoring the suffering and injustice that are rampant in our world.

Like Bartimeus, there are so many in our world today whose lives are being impacted by misuse of power. We are talking about real people, with real stories. They are more than caricatures, but the danger of the crowd mentality is that it can quickly dehumanize the other. The one who is different. The one who is blind like Bartimeus or has the wrong passport or accent or wrong tattoos.

Now I confess, it’s easy to point fingers. To dip into the well of spiritual superiority and consider myself better than those posting things on Facebook that I disagree with, but the response of moral and spiritual superiority is not the answer. To fight pride with pride and hate with hate never works. So instead, as followers of Jesus, let us do the hard work of self reflection. The work of unblinding ourselves with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Do we live our lives with an abundance of mercy or do we only give our attention to those we like and those who are easy to love or those who we want to gain favor from? How do we treat those who are below us socially and economically? Or those we deem to have wrong theology? Or those who have wronged us in the past. Do we help build them up, or do we tear them down? Do we press in or do we pull away? Do we behave like the members in the crowd or like Jesus?

The people of Jericho know Bartimaeus as the annoying blind guy always asking for money. He is a drain on the community's resources. An eye sore at the public gate as people enter their city. His cries for alms shatter the image of success and prosperity the crowd are seeking to portray. The people in the crowd think they know Bartimeus, but how can they as they've never sat with him in the dust and listened to his story.

No, they would never allow themselves to be tainted by him, by his sinfulness and uncleanness. But in their dehumanizing of him, they have severely underestimated Bartimeus. There is more to him than meets the eye. There is more to him than being a blind beggar, and this is where the story gets interesting.

When Bartimeus learns that Jesus is in Jericho, he gets excited. Why? because he has heard that Jesus can heal the sick and the lame. The carpenter from Nazareth dares to touch lepers. There is a physicality to the ministry of Jesus. There is a tactileness to it. Jesus' ministry is a ministry of healing touch, and ours should be as well. How are we reaching out and physically touching the lives of others to bring healing? Bartimeus has hope that this Jesus of Nazareth might help him. Which begs the question, do our communities have hope that we will do the same?

Filled with hope, Bartimeus uses the one skill he has. He's spent years sitting on the side of the road begging. His eyes might not work, but he has a loud voice. So he takes a deep breath, and as the crowd following Jesus walks by him, he begins to shout as loud as he can. **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

His voice carries over the crowd as they escort Jesus out of their big beautiful city. In middle eastern culture there is great importance placed on appropriate welcomes and farewells, but Bartimeus doesn't care that he's potentially disrupting the established norms and pleasantries. Over and over he shouts. Louder and louder. The desperate cry of a desperate man. **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

The crowd aren't pleased with Bartimeus. He's embarrassing them. They don't bother to ask why he is behaving this way. They think only of themselves and lash out. Their words are deadly arrows.

"Stop drawing attention to yourself. You're worthless." They ridicule him with hate-filled tongues. I can imagine some in the crowd picking up stones ready to harm him with more than words. The crowd whips itself into a storm. At the center, a poor blind man seeking mercy from a dire situation not of his making. Often when group-think and mob justice and chaos rule, it is the most vulnerable who suffer. But not this time. Not this day.

Bartimeus refuses to let the words of the crowd define him and silence him. Bartimeus is fierce, fearless. He is just getting warmed up. Just finding his voice as the crowd looms over him. He takes in another giant breath. His lungs exploding with the sound of defiance, lips rattling, spittle flying. Words breaking forth, his battle cry unleashed. Don't think of him as blind Bartimeus. Think of him as bold Bartimeus. The man who faced the crowd and forced them to see his humanity. His cries for mercy are louder and more powerful than their shouts of hatred. He refuses to be silenced and trampled on anymore. He knows that he has value, even if they can't see it. And suddenly up ahead, Jesus stops. He's heard the commotion. He's heard someone calling his name. What will he do? This is a true WWJD moment.

Jesus turns to the crowd and utters two simple words. "Call him."

Jesus wants to meet Bartimeus. He wants to look him in the face. He does not see him as an inconvenience, because Jesus valued people and relationships over everything else. As I've lived with this text over the past couple of months I've marveled at Jesus' response, because, truthfully, there are lots of people who I consider inconvenient. People who tend to talk too long when I'm in a hurry or are always asking for something or complaining or are just down right annoying.

But Jesus' response left me asking this question— what would it be like to live in such a way that I didn't view anyone as inconvenient? Often the people who get my full attention are the people who I like, or the people who can help me get what I want. But this is not the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is the way of mercy for all people. To do otherwise is to follow the way of the crowd. Each day I must choose to follow the crowd or to follow Jesus.

As soon as Jesus shows interest in Bartimaeus a marvelous thing happens. The people in the crowd who just seconds ago were yelling at him change their tune. "The Teacher wants to see you. Come!" Bartimeus doesn't need to be told twice. He leaps up and throws off his cloak. He doesn't want anything to hinder his ability to get to Jesus. But now there is a dilemma. How is he going to make his way through the crowd and get to Jesus?

This my friends is the first miracle. Jesus' by his actions and by his words forces the crowd to help Bartimaeus. I like to think that as Bartimaeus made his way forward, the people who never before would have touched him are now helping him along. They put down their stones, and gently touch his arms, guiding him towards Jesus. He who was shunned and pushed to the outskirts is now welcomed into the heat of the community. As followers of Jesus we are called to do the same. To create a community where all are welcomed.

Bartimaeus finally makes it to Jesus and stands before him. Jesus asks him a simple question. "What can I do for you?"

What does Bartimeus want? Does he want power, or money, or revenge? What would you ask for if you were in his shoes?

Bartimeus responds emphatically, "Teacher, I want to see."

And we just have to take a second here to recognize the humor of what's happening. Here Jesus is surrounded by a giant crowd of people, but the only person who actually sees him for who he really is, the long awaited Messiah and Savior, is the blind beggar. This should tell us something!

We are often quick to judge people. I confess I do it too. The crowd all think that Bartimaeus is some sinful, annoying person. An inconvenience. Little do they know that he is a person of deep faith and understanding. When we judge people, we often miss out on the opportunity to see the goodness that resides within them. Instead, we live as if we are blind. We shut down the possibility that we might have something to learn from them. Bartimeus had much to offer all along, but the people were unable to see it.

So friends, in place of judgment, may we be quick to listen and ask questions and live with curiosity and wonder as we interact with others.

Jesus looks at Bartimaeus, and in front of the whole crowd he declares. “Go, your faith has healed you.” He simultaneously heals Bartimaeus physically and restores his position within the community. He affirms his name. Jesus lets everyone know that Bartimeus is someone to be respected and valued. There at the heart of the crowd at the feet of Jesus Bartimaeus finds the healing he so desperately longed for.

I think what makes Bartimeus’ story so beautiful is that it is our story too. All of us need to be healed by Jesus. Healed of our pride and anger and jealousy and unforgiveness, and the list could go on and on. We, like the crowd, carry within us the capacity to harm others. This is a tough pill to swallow, but it’s true. We have to face this and cry out to Jesus for help so that we receive Jesus’ healing. And here’s where it gets fun, then can become vessels of his healing and mercy and create healthy faith communities where each person is treated with dignity and value and radical hospitality. This is the way of Jesus. So as you go forth this week, may you be filled with the boldness of Bartimaeus and mercy of Jesus for all you meet. Amen.