

St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
Albuquerque, NM  
Sunday Oct. 28, 2018 Proper 25B  
Text: Mark 10:46-52 Bartimaeus  
Preacher: The Rev. Christopher McLaren  
Theme: Becoming Beggars

In the spiritual traditions, blindness is the inability to notice, understand, and integrate the spiritual dimension of life. It is a form of poverty to lack spiritual insight and knowledge, to know who you truly are. We live in a culture that exhibits this blindness to such a degree that it is easy to despair, witness the senseless horror of the killing of faithful worshipers in a synagogue yesterday in Pittsburgh.

This passage of scripture seems like a story about a blind beggar, Bartimaeus. However, it is really a parable about our own poverty of spirit. The scriptures are meant to be offensive enough to challenge our own consciousness. They are meant to agitate and draw us into a quest for the living God. This story if we read it correctly, points out that we too are beggars. We are beggars to the extent that we fail to understand that we are living members, sons and daughters of the Living God. This is our true identity but so much around us works against us recognizing it and living out of that reality.

The Christian story is unique, it centers on the person of Jesus. If one wants to become a Christian, one desires to know the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. We are beggars until we have entered into the mystical and powerful meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Until we know this story as our own, we too sit beside the road, sit on the sidelines.

The story of Bartimaeus is unsettling but also enticing. Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus. He yells to get his attention. He wants mercy. He wants to know this Jesus person.

His begging for attention is embarrassing. We don't like beggars. We shy away from needy people on the side of the road. We try to shut them down just like those in the story. We want them to be quiet, to become invisible. But Jesus recognizes true hunger, true desire for something more, for mercy in the midst of a world of rejection and ignorance.

The question of this story is unsettling for modest folks like ourselves. The question is, "Are we calling out to Jesus, are we calling for his attention?" Do we want to know and be known by the One who has been sent into the world as the very image

of God? Do we want to penetrate the mystery of the divine human relationship? If we do there is One who can show us the way.

If our crying out is loud enough, if we refuse to be silent, the one who hears all cries for liberation will stop and take notice. Jesus hears all cries for liberation. Jesus is headed toward Jerusalem along the Jericho road. He is going straight into conflict and death, yet he stops along the road of his destiny to listen to the beggar within Bartimeaus and to invite him to come with him on the way. Everyone who begs for sight from their heart is heard by the clear-sighted one. Jesus can hear our desperate cry because he is one who even hears children. He is the compassionate one.

Jesus tests our desire. No one has the money to purchase great desire, it must come from within you. Understanding your heart's desire is a key moment in the spiritual life. As one of the ancient's said, God finds our desires not too strong but too weak."

There is an ancient story of a rabbi who seeks with great desire:

Reb Mendl studied at the House of Learning. "He gathered knowledge with burning eagerness, but after a while a yearning for something more began to glow in him." Reb Mendel was not satisfied with mere intellectual knowledge. He thought that when he studied past masters, he should be able to enter into their presence. In particular, when he poured over Rabbi Alfasi, he wanted to be able to experience him. He wept in anguish when he was not able to do this.

One night, Alfasi appeared to him in a dream, saying only, "You are to go to Elimelekh." Reb Mendl had never heard of this man, but he left immediately to search for him. After much wandering, "weary and in tatters, hungry and freezing," he managed to reach Reb Elimelekh's house. "The secretary refused to admit this person who looked like one of the beggars that had lately pestered the Rebbe." But Reb Mendl forced his way in and found the Rebbe.

"Who sent you?" asked Reb Elimelekh.

"Alfasi did," said Reb Mendl.

Reb Elimelekh stared at the stranger for a long moment, then said, "You can stay with me." (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *A Passion for Truth*).

I love this story of seeking. Reb Mendl is not content with the traditional learning. He wants more. He wants to drink from a deeper well of spirit. His searching turns him into a beggar by the time he reaches Rabbi Elimelekh's house. Elimelekh can see the passion in his eyes and welcomes the stranger to his home and teaching.

I suppose that we come to church to this House of Learning at St. Mark's for many reasons: We desire community, we love the liturgy, we need to be inspired, we want our kids to have a moral foundation, we are searching for something, we are lonely and we want to be known, we are hungry and we want to be fed. All of these are beautiful reasons, longings of the heart. The hope is that in time all of these become too small, that a deeper longing takes over and begins to glow in us. The longing is not just for knowledge but for a greater relationship with the mystery of God. It is a longing to not just know about God but to experience God in the person of Jesus Christ, the one who can teach us more about the divine – human relationship than any other.

Paul says it this way in the letter to the Philippians:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:10-11)

Bartimaeus, the beggar, wants to know the revelation of Jesus, Son of David. He will not be denied; he will not be silenced by the crowd or his own sense of decorum. Jesus perceives the fury of his desire, his fierce begging for mercy and calls him to him. Jesus' passion is equal to Bartimaeus' desire. In a moment, Seeker and sought are face to face. Something in Bartimaeus allows him to desire Jesus and to leave everything behind to follow him on the way. Faith, the single unquenchable desire of his heart, has opened his eyes. Faith cures blindness by creating a passionate quest for deeper revelation, for deeper relationship with the living God.

As we enter this sacred time of All Hallows Eve, All Saints and All Souls here at St. Mark's we remember those who have gone before us, those whose passion for God became the driving force in their lives. We celebrate those who have burned brightly with the love of God in a world that so desperately needed their light and life and love. But we remember the lives of the saints not just celebrate them, but rather to become like them.

No one has the money to purchase great desire. The most important things in life cannot be bought, they must be lovingly nurtured. Like Bartimaeus we must beg the merciful to teach us the way to God. We make ourselves available to learn. We seek after the person of Jesus to know his ways.

For Christians, followers of Jesus, our great desire is to understand and enter into the revelation of the Cross and Resurrection. We want to know the deep mystery of

new life coming out of certain death. We want to sense in our very bones the truth of resurrection made manifest at the center of creation, in the energy of the universe, the deep-down knowledge that God is good and brings new life out of what looks like defeat. This is why we are willing to become beggars, like all the saints of old, that god might have mercy on our blindness. For knowing Christ and the power of his death and resurrection is the one thing truly worth begging for.

*Calling out to hungry hearts  
Everywhere through endless time  
Calling out to hungry hearts  
I offer you this heart of mine.*

*Calling out to hungry hearts  
Everywhere through endless time  
Calling out to hungry hearts  
All the lost and left behind.*

*Gather round and share this meal  
Your joy and your sorrow, I make it mine.  
May our hunger lead us to the merciful one and may our begging open our eyes  
to the mystery of Christ in our own lives.*