

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
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“We Can Get It!”
Mark 10:46-52

So what do Nemo, Aladdin, Wall-E and blind Bartimaeus have in common? I know that that is the question that each of you had whirling through your brains since you saw the bulletin cover this morning. No they are not all Disney films, or Pixar films or animated films...since Bartimaeus does not fit those categories. What do they hold in common? They are all stories with happy endings, and we are suckers for happy endings. Unlike Europeans that tend to have stories like the Brothers Grimm, which are very depressing, we Americans have always loved a story with a happy ending. From Horatio Alger, ask your parents, to Sleepless in Seattle we can't get enough of the tough times yield happy ending stories. I believe that this is reason that Bartimaeus and his tale have been popular Christian fodder for children's story books. Consider how it works. Bartimaeus was once a happy lad. Then one day, probably in an accident, he lost his sight. When his parents died he no longer had anyone to care for him. His only recourse was to become a beggar. Helpless he spent years receiving whatever people would throw on his cloak. Then one day, completely unexpected Jesus comes by. Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus but never expected to meet him. He cries out. Jesus hears. Bartimaeus makes his way to Jesus and is healed. Happy ending. We love it. But that raises a question for me, why tell it?

I ask that question for several reasons. First we already know that Jesus can heal the blind. He has done it before in the Gospel of Mark. Granted his time he does it much more efficiently that he did the last time. So the question is what does this add to the story? Second, why tell this story when it makes Jesus not look quite as good as he might. How so? Bartimaeus is blind. He is a beggar. He is barely living. He runs up to Jesus and what does Jesus do? He asks him what he wants! Come on Jesus, he is not looking for tips as to who to draft in Fantasy Gladiator. Surely Jesus knew what he wanted. Finally why tell this story here? Jesus is about to enter the lion's den. He will soon become the prey of those who will arrest and crucify him. This is the moment of painful decision. So why tell such a happy ending story here? Why? I would argue Mark tells this happy ending story based not on Bartimaeus getting it...and I am not talking about getting his sight.

This story is not about someone getting their sight, it is about someone who could see already; someone who could see more clearly than anyone else in the Gospel of Mark. What I mean by that is that Bartimaeus is the only person who sees what it means to be a Jesus person. How so? Let's walk through his story, and as we do let's see how his sight is better than everyone else's.

We begin with the fact that he knows who Jesus is. Bartimaeus calls Jesus “Son of david.” Bartimaeus knows that Jesus has come to be the new king, the savior of God's people.

Remember the debate among the people and the disciples as to Jesus' identity. He was Elijah, John the Baptist, a prophet and a misunderstood messiah. Bartimaeus sees who Jesus is.

Bartimaeus believes that Jesus has come to welcome all people into this new kingdom and is not willing to give up on that belief. When he first cries out people try to silence him. They see him as less than worthy to meet Jesus. He refuses to believe that. Unlike the parents who tried to bring their children to Jesus and gave up when the disciples confronted them, he will not give up. He sees clearly that Jesus love and grace are for all people.

Bartimaeus is willing to give up everything to be with Jesus. We see this when he throws off his cloak and runs to Jesus. The cloak for Bartimaeus is not there to keep him warm. Where he lived the weather was usually quite balmy. His cloak was where he caught money from strangers. Without it he could not collect anything. Unlike the rich man who give up nothing to follow Jesus, Bartimaeus saw that to come to Jesus you often need to leave everything behind.

Bartimaeus was willing to be changed. Jesus asks him up front what he wants. While this may seem a dumb question, Jesus wants to know if Bartimaeus is ready for a new life...one which will not be easy because he has no skills, no family connections and no one on whom to depend...and he can no longer beg. But he is willing to be transformed. This separates him the Pharisees who do not want to be freed from the rules and regulations of the law. They want to remain as they are even when Jesus offers new life.

Finally Bartimaeus followed Jesus. Notice carefully how Mark crafts the telling of this story. Jesus heals him and then says, "Go, your faith has made you well." At this moment Bartimaeus is free to go anywhere he wants. So what does he do? He follows Jesus. He follows Jesus into Jerusalem and the death that awaits. What we need to remember is that many of those who had followed Jesus, seen his miracles, proclaimed him king, refused to follow him when they even began to glimpse what was ahead. Bartimaeus sees clearly what he needs to do...follow Jesus.

Have you ever wanted to get it? Have you ever wanted to get what this church, Jesus, God thing was all about? While many of us might have times of great clarity, I think there are moments when it all seems kind of confusing. Some people tell us it is all about knowing the right material; knowing the right doctrine and having the right beliefs. Other people tell us that it is about doing some things and not doing other things. As long as we do enough of the right kind of acts and avoid doing others then we are fine. Still others say it is all about being nice. As long as we are nice then we don't have to be part of a church, attend worship or believe anything in particular. Finally there are those who talk about changing the world...as long as we are being socially active then that is what this Jesus thing is all about. Have you ever wanted to get it? If so then all you need to do is return to this story and allow Bartimaeus to show you the way.

Bartimaeus gets it. He gets who Jesus is, how Jesus loves us, how we are to cry out to Jesus, how we are to let Jesus change us and how we are to follow Jesus even into the most difficult of times. So the challenge for us to let a man who had no sight show us the way. So here is your challenge for the week...am I willing to live a Bartimaeus life? Am I willing to

allow Bartimaeus to show me how I ought to live as a follower of the Christ, the Son of David and the son of God?