

Lectionary 30 Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost Year B 2021
October 24, 2021

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

Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was a nobody. Because of his disability, because of his blindness, all he was ever expected to do in life was sit along the road as a beggar, accepting the charity of passersby. As people walked past him, at best they would have seen him as a nuisance. Day in and day out, Bartimaeus would make his way to his familiar spot along the crowded streets of Jericho. He was just another beggar, just another sinner, easily ignored and forgotten to the people who rushed by on their way to something glamorous and important.

You see, Jericho wasn't just any city. Jericho was a city for the important people, for those with money, those who were successful and had a reputation. Herod had his winter palace there, and all the rich Roman families spent their winters in Jericho. And, even better, you couldn't get to Jerusalem without passing through Jericho, so anyone who wanted to be noticed would find their way to Jericho.

And so, every morning, Bartimaeus made his way to the Jericho Road, knowing that the rich people, the military and the important people had to pass by on their way. But even on this main road, Bartimaeus and the other beggars were little more than scenery to the rest of the world. Occasionally, someone would drop a copper penny or two in his bowl so that he could eat for the day. It was easy for these beggars to feel as though their life was meaningless and unimportant. But this wasn't the case for Bartimaeus. Deep down, Bartimaeus knew that he *wasn't* a nobody, he was someone, someone that mattered. He knew that God's love for him was deeper than his disability. He was certain that even though people tried not to see him, God saw him, and that was all that mattered.

Then one day, Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was visiting and traveling through Jericho. Jesus had been preaching and teaching, and crowds of people gathered to hear him everywhere he went. Word was spreading about Jesus, rumors that Jesus could perform miracles, cure the sick, and that he preached about God's love. But Bartimaeus couldn't get near Jesus. Unable to see, the crowds were too difficult to navigate.

But upon hearing that Jesus would be traveling along the road, Bartimaeus decided this was his chance. He mustered every ounce of strength that he had and shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" But the crowd must have been embarrassed by Bartimaeus, certain that Jesus didn't have time for a blind beggar. They tried to silence him, but Bartimaeus shouted even louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Despite the crowd's efforts, Jesus heard Bartimaeus, and called the crowd to bring him forward.

Suddenly, everything shifted. The crowd that had been trying to silence Bartimaeus was now encouraging him. "Take heart; get up, he is calling you," they said. And Bartimaeus sprang up, left his cloak, and came to Jesus. The crowds parted for him like they never had before. For the first time in his life, people were taking notice of Bartimaeus as he was standing before Jesus.

Jesus took time to listen to Bartimaeus, to ask what he needed, to honor and respect him as a beloved child of God. And when the request came, "My teacher, let me see again," Jesus responded with seven life-changing, yet simple, words. "Go; your faith has made you well." And with that, Bartimaeus could see. A whole world was now open to him, he wouldn't have to be an outcast and a beggar anymore, he was healed and set free. And in his freedom, Bartimaeus immediately chooses to follow Jesus.

This story of Bartimaeus is often seen as one of Jesus' great healing miracles. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus regularly transforms the lives of those on the margins and draws

them more and more into the center of the story, into the spotlight. But this isn't the only miraculous healing and transformation that happens in this story.

The crowd in today's reading saw this blind beggar as an annoyance, disturbing Jesus as he preached and taught about God's kingdom and God's love. This blind beggar was hardly worthy of a name from the crowd's perspective, he was just a distraction from tradition, a bump along the road to bigger and better things. But when Jesus hears Bartimaeus' cry, Jesus moves him from the sidelines, and reveals Bartimaeus' humanity and dignity to the crowd.

Bartimaeus knew what it meant to be a beloved child of God. Not only did he know that he was beloved, but he also insisted on being *treated* as a beloved child of God. Not even the crowd could hold him back, and Jesus recognizes him for his faithfulness and courage.

As a church, and as individuals in the world, we have a tendency to become like the crowd in today's reading. We tend to ignore the needs of those sitting right outside our doors, the needs of those who have nothing to live on but faith. The Bartimaeus' of our world today don't always sit along the streets as beggars, but they are there, with deep need, reaching out to us for help. Too often, we'd rather remain ignorant, uninformed, and unwilling to see those around us in need, because we don't want to feel any sort of responsibility to care or provide for them.

But as we listen, we hear their cries, just like Bartimaeus:

-Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us who have been deemed unacceptable and irrelevant.

-Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us who can't keep up with the materialism of our culture.

-Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us who have been hurt by the church or told we are unworthy of God's love.

-Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us who have been broken by grief, loss, and failure.

-Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us who are crippled by chronic illness and disease.

-Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us who have been shut out and called illegal, immigrant, or refugee.

We have heard these cries, and many more, over and over again in our world. And so often, we wish we could silence them, make them go away, ignore them for just a little longer so we can have a bit of peace.

And yet, Jesus says, "Call them here," and our lives are transformed.

In our Gospel reading, the crowd is the first miracle of healing. Despite their ignorance, Jesus enables the crowd to finally recognize Bartimaeus and the needs of the world. And the same is true for us. God has called each of us as beloved children, loves us, and heals us of our hardness of heart so that we can see and care for the needs of the world around us, inviting them too to share in Christ's healing.

All the crowd really had to do was get out of the way so that Bartimaeus could get to Jesus. And the same is true for us—God transforms our lives, helping us to get out of the way, guiding us to cast aside our ignorance, selfishness, and hardness of heart, so that Jesus can work in and through us.

God *is* at work in this world. God *is* bringing about transformation, healing and hope. And God has started with each of us in baptism, calling us to get out of the way, to see the needs of our neighbors, and to invite them to share in God's love and healing. Whether we are broken and in need, calling out for help like Bartimaeus, or even if we're part of the crowd that tries to silence him, the message is the same: God's healing, transformation, and love are for each and every one of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.