

Greenhills Community Church

October 24, 2021

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Sermon: *The Man Who Heard the Man Who Hollered*

Mark 10:46-52

Notice what a keen ear Jesus has. Jesus and his friends leave Jericho in the midst of a large crowd. He is surrounded by followers and curiosity seekers who have heard about his reputation. He is also part of the general flow of traffic toward Jerusalem for the Passover holy days. Imagine a great press of people, jostling, talking, laughing, children running, animals complaining. Jesus, no doubt, is conversing with his disciples as they go.

And in the midst of all this, Jesus hears a solitary voice calling from the roadside, the cry of a blind beggar. This is the kind of person who is easy to overlook. He's a panhandler. People look away when they pass by, his misfortune waking their guilt or fear. Most beggars in those days staked their territory, so the poor man is probably a fixture there, part of the daily scenery. Even his name—Bartimaeus—isn't really a name. Bartimaeus is Aramaic for "son of Timaeus." In modern parlance, he's "Tim's boy," not really a personal name at all, just an extension of somebody else.

This is an easy guy to miss. People miss him all the time.

But not Jesus.

Among all the din of voices, Jesus hears the plea of pain. Bartimaeus cries out of his own personal darkness, cries out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" and Jesus hears.

This was Israel's great claim, that their God was a God who listens—a God who never naps, never leaves town, never turns off the cell phone, but a God who always hears. The Old Testament abounds with examples. God hears the moans of Jewish slaves in Egypt. God hears the whispered prayer of childless Hannah. God hears the whimper of little Ishmael lost in the desert without water. God hears!

There's a cave-dweller called the free-tailed bat. Free-tailed mothers hang their children on cave walls. The babies are tiny and crowded together, something like two thousand babies to a square yard, and if the bat colony is large, the babies cover yards and yards. Bats don't see well and it's dark in the cave, so momma has to locate her baby by ear. When it's feeding time, the mother listens for her baby's squeal. Among thousands and thousands of competing squeaks and shrieks and screeches, the mother hears the cry of her own child and she comes.

Child of God, do you think no one hears your prayer? Child of Christ, do you think no one hears the outpouring of your heart? Jesus has a keen ear. Jesus hears Bartimaeus. Jesus hears you. Just call out. Jesus always hears his children.

Jesus has a keen ear, and Jesus has a compassionate heart. The crowd doesn't care about Bartimaeus. When he starts yelling, people shush him up. "What's the matter with you? Nobody wants to hear about your problems; we've got problems of our own. Don't bother Jesus. The Teacher has important things to do."

And that much is true. Jesus does have important things to do. There are good reasons why Jesus should push on toward Jerusalem and pass by Bartimaeus. The healing phase of Jesus' ministry has already ended. The cleansing of lepers, the healing of the lame, the restoration of the blind and the deaf—all those signs that reveal the presence of God's power in Jesus' ministry, that's done. Jesus has moved on to the next level. Now he's preparing to heal the world. He's heading toward Jerusalem where he will die on the cross in order to save humanity from sin and death.

Not to be cruel or crass, but in light of what Jesus is going to do in Jerusalem, does it matter so much whether one beggar receives his sight? That's certainly how the world looks at things. We ridicule people for majoring in minors, and we promote people who shut out distractions and focus on the big picture.

Christianity strives for a different definition of major and minor, a different view of the big picture. Some years ago, St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City was seeking a new president. The search committee narrowed the applicants to five eminently qualified people. Each was intelligent, energetic, respected, endowed with leadership skills. How to choose one from the five? That's when the seminary Search Committee took an unorthodox approach. They sent representatives to the five institutions where the candidates were currently

working, and they interviewed the janitorial staff in each place. They asked the housekeepers and the cleaning crew, "What do you think of this person?" Only one candidate received a glowing appraisal. A fellow named William MacElvaney was praised for friendliness, for greeting the janitors by name, for chatting with folks who are often considered to be on the lowest rung of the ladder. MacElvaney became the next President of St. Paul's School of Theology.

That sounds pretty Christian to me, which is to say it sounds a lot like Christ, because when Jesus hears the cry of Bartimaeus, he stops in his tracks. Mark says, "He stood still." What a rare gift that is, to stand still—in the hurry, in the bustle, in the priority of our important work, in the press of daily demands and deadlines—to stand still and to pay attention to someone who needs us, not later, not when it's convenient, not when it fits our schedule, but at that very moment.

Significantly, this is the final healing recorded in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus really has changed direction by this point. He truly has a different priority, a different plan. Nevertheless, when this blind man calls his name, Jesus stops. He pauses on that all-important journey to Jerusalem. He sets aside for a moment the calling of the cross. What a compassionate heart Jesus has. He hears and he cares. He cares not only for the great big world, but also for the little people of the world, the folks on the sidelines, the overlooked and the overburdened, the overwhelmed and the underloved . . . people like you and me.

A keen ear . . . A compassionate heart . . . And we'd be remiss if we finished this story without noting that Jesus also has a strong hand. It's not just that he hears us and cares about us; he also has the power to help us.

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asks Bartimaeus. There are no limits in that question, no qualifications, no hesitation.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks.

To his credit, Bartimaeus isn't timid. He doesn't say, "I'd like to receive more alms each day." He doesn't say, "Give me a better location." He doesn't say, "I need a bigger begging bowl."

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks

And Bartimaeus says, "Let me see!"

He asks a great gift from a great Savior, and Jesus gives it to him. I know the theology of prayer. I know that God is not a vending machine to dispense whatever refreshment we crave at the moment. I understand that life must have challenges and struggles; after all, the powerful hand of Jesus is also a nail-scarred hand.

I know all that, but let's not hem and haw about what we believe. Jesus Christ has the power to reach into your existence and mine and make a difference. Christ can open eyes and open doors. Christ can mend your circumstances. Christ can heal you. What Christ does for Bartimaeus, Christ can do for you and me. That's what we believe!

Of course, let's not overlook the role of Bartimaeus. For instance, he asks for help. That's *prayer*.

And when Jesus says to him, "Come here," Bartimaeus comes. That's *obedience*.

Notice that Bartimaeus casts off his garment so it won't hinder him as he pushes through the crowd toward Jesus. For a poor man that outer robe was coat, blanket, bedding, pillow, and shelter all in one, a great deal to cast away. Bartimaeus' approach to Jesus exemplifies both *faith and risk*.

And once healed, what does Bartimaeus do? "Immediately he regained his sight and followed (Jesus) on the way." That's *discipleship*.

Oh, yes, Bartimaeus does his part.

From Jesus: a keen ear, a caring heart, a mighty hand. From Bartimaeus: prayer, boldness, obedience, faith, risk, and commitment. No wonder something amazing happens when Jesus and Bartimaeus come together.

Take what you need from this story, friends. If you need reassurance that God hears, cares and acts, then behold the Lord Jesus pausing on his way to the cross just to help a nameless beggar beside the road.

On the other hand, if you need a lesson in trust and prayer, then bend an ear toward that persistent voice, yelling to be heard above the crowd, ignoring the naysayers, shouting again and again, "Jesus, have mercy!"

There would be no miracle in this story without the presence of Jesus. But neither would there be a miracle in this story without the shouting of Bartimaeus.

Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.

And those who have voices to cry out, let them cry out.

Soli Deo Gloria!