

22 S. after Pentecost 10/24/21
Mark 10:46-52 25B

“JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!”

When Martin Luther died in Eisleben Germany, a scrap piece of paper was found in his coat pocket which read, “This is true. We are all beggars.”¹ What had this German monk – whom God had chosen as his special instrument to reform the Church; this pastor – to whom God had granted extraordinary gifts to translate and teach the Bible -- what had he concluded after a lifetime full of accomplishment? That he – and each and every one of us – are nothing but beggars before a holy and gracious God; who can do nothing but cry to Jesus.

As we heard in our Gospel lessons these past Sundays, Jesus has set out on a journey where he would march into Jerusalem to shouts of “hosanna” and march out to cries of “crucify Him!” Mark tells us today that as He came to Jericho, a city about 15 miles from Jerusalem, “As He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.”

Look at this beggar Bartimaeus. He lived in the city of Jericho. Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world, and it was a **cursed** city. You remember the story, or at least the song: When Joshua led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, the first city they besieged was Jericho. The walls came a tumblin’ down, and Joshua pronounced a curse upon the place. He prophesied when the foundation of the new Jericho would be laid, the builder’s oldest son would die and when the gates of the city were hung, his youngest son would pass away as well. Hundreds of years later, Jericho was rebuilt, and, we read in 1 Kings 16:34, that Joshua’s curse was fulfilled.

And, there was his family situation. The name “Bartimaeus” isn’t a name at all. Just as the name Ericson originally meant “son of Eric” and Fitzpatrick meant “son of Patrick,” Bartimaeus means “son of Timaeus.” That’s a beautiful sounding name, isn’t it? The son of Timaeus. But, your opinion will most certainly change when I tell you the name Timaeus means “defiled,” (Barnes Bible Dictionary) “unclean,” (Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary) nasty, corrupt. That makes Bartimaeus the “son of the nasty guy.” Which means Bartimaeus lives in a cursed town, and if names mean anything, he comes from a family situation that is, well, quite the opposite of loving and supportive.

And you know the rest of the story -- Bartimaeus is blind. Blindness is a horrible affliction in any age, but it was especially so in 1st-century Israel. There were no guide dogs, no talking traffic lights, no braille, no specialized schools or homes or services. Because no one would hire them for work, blind people were almost inevitably left to beg for their daily bread. To add insult to injury, the blind also lived under the social stigma that their blindness was God’s punishment for some sin that either they or their ancestors had committed.

How does that go in baseball? Three strikes and you’re out! Bartimaeus was out on the street, doing the only job someone with his qualifications could do: he begged. He put away his pride, disregarded his dignity and depended upon the mercy of others to survive.

Now that we’ve met the blind man with three strikes against him, let me stop for just a moment and ask you, “How are you doing? How is your life going? Perfect in every way? Or do you feel that you already have two strikes against you, and you’re just waiting for strike # 3? How’s the money situation? The job? The bills? The children? Has that someone special

turned out to be not-so-special? Angry with someone? Angry at God? Want me to keep going? I don't really need to, do I? You see things aren't turning out the way you thought they would, are they? Disappointment, depression, discouragement, denial, doubts; things people have done to you, things you've done to yourself. Things that you wanted to accomplish that you never quite got around to doing. Sin, anger, greed, lust, loneliness, hate -- they're all there. Maybe, like Bartimaeus, you see only a future filled with drab, dreary darkness.

But as blind as Bartimaeus was, there was one thing that, **by God's grace**, he could see more than many who had 20/20 vision. He could see Jesus! In faith, He knows who Jesus is and He cries to the Savior, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! ... Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus calls Bartimaeus to Him and the Savior does have mercy, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed Him on the way.

Blind Bartimaeus' faith saved him and healed him because it led him to the only one who could save him – Jesus, the Son of David. He was a beggar, all right, but **He begged the right person**.

The Good News of the Gospel is that just as Jesus had mercy on blind Bartimaeus, he has mercy on all the spiritual blind. Remember we said Jesus was on a journey, a journey that will take Him through Jericho, to Jerusalem. He's already told His disciples about what will happen to Him there, "...the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock Him and spit on Him, and flog Him and kill Him. And after three days He will rise" (Mk 10:33-34). Jesus will shoulder the sins of every person who has ever lived. He will be sold out by a friend;

denied by another and deserted by the rest. He, the sinless Son of God, will be falsely accused, beaten, spit upon, crowned with thorns, found guilty of trumped up charges, whipped, and crucified. Jesus is completing a life's journey that began in Bethlehem. He is fulfilling God's mission, set into motion before time began, to save the souls of all who believe on Him as their Redeemer. Jesus is buying back the world at the cost of His life.

It is most certainly true that we are all poor, miserable beggars before God. But, faith leads us to beg the right person, Jesus, the Son of David. Which is why it's no coincidence that one of the first things we do each week in our liturgy is to sing or say the words of the Kyrie: "Lord have mercy." These words not only remind us that we are beggars; they remind us who is serving who in the "worship service". We don't come here to serve – we have nothing, **absolutely** nothing, that God needs -- no, we come here to be served by Jesus!

And serve us Jesus does! Remember I asked you to take a look at your life and the "strikes" you are carrying around. Those "strikes" in our lives help us see how truly **weak** we are. So, we come as beggars, with our shopping bag empty and God fills it. He serves us with His mercy in the absolution -- you hear the voice of Jesus filling your bag with forgiveness. As you eat and drink Christ's very Body and Blood, He is filling your bag with forgiveness, life, salvation, and strength to live a holy life. Here, as you cry, "Lord, have mercy," Jesus fills your bag with love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (cf. Ga 5:22-23).

One other thing in our lesson this morning – did you notice that when Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus, the voices of the world told him to be silent? In our 1st Peter Bible class, we have been studying the legion of voices

yelling at us today to be silent about Jesus. “We don’t want to hear about Jesus,” they cry, so you Christians just **shut up**. And those voices don’t stop there. They cry that we are fools to even think of following Jesus. Those are the voices in Bartimaeus’ day, and in our day as well.

But, Dear Friends in Christ, like Bartimaeus, we do follow Jesus, for His rod and His staff comfort us, and we cannot help but tell the good news about Jesus.

We are all beggars before God. Good News we rejoice and sing of this day is that Jesus came to hear and help beggars like Bartimaeus and beggars like you and me.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹Kittleson, James A. *Luther The Reformer* Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1986. (296-297)