***WHAT DO YOU WANT?***

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October 27, 2024

Texts: Psalm 126:1-3 and Mark 10:46-52

It would have been so easy to ignore the beggar with all else that was going on – the crowd swarming around him, the disciples with their petty spats, and Holy Jerusalem looming ahead with a week’s worth of misery awaiting. How many others sat by the side of the road or at the door to the synagogue or at the gates to the city asking for a few coins to buy a cup of coffee or get a bite to eat or purchase a pair of sandals for sore and aching feet? You and I drive by them all the time at the intersections on the way into town. There is no way that we can stop for them all, and no way that Jesus could either, no way that he could meet the needs of all those who asked for help or healing, no way that he could respond to all those who called out his name or begged for a handout. Why then did Jesus stop for Bartimaeus? Why did he take time to hear his plea and meet his need when there were so many pleas and so many needs being raised to him everywhere he went?

What might cause you to stop and help one of those folks? Someone calling out your name, perhaps? I wonder if it may have been Bartimaeus’ cry that caught Jesus’ attention that day? “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” It wasn’t just his name - Jesus; it was also the title, Son of David, a messianic title that no one had attributed to Jesus, according to Mark, until Bartimaeus voiced it from the side of the road. There is no indication that Bartimaeus had ever met Jesus or knew that he was a descendant of David; the crowd told him only that it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by, yet somehow blind Bartimaeus believed that Jesus was the Messiah, believed it enough to shout out, “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*” To this point in Mark’s gospel only two others had declared Jesus to be the Messiah: the man possessed by demons at Gerasene called him Son of the Most High God, and when Jesus asked the disciples who they said he was, Peter responded, “You are the Messiah!” at which point Jesus told them, “Don’t tell anyone!” But if they obeyed and told no one, how did Bartimaeus know? The text does not tell us; perhaps it was divine inspiration or perhaps desperation. But in any event, perhaps it was his name and that title – *Son of David* – that caught Jesus’ attention and led him to stop and call Bartimaeus to his side.

Compassion and help were the substance of Bartimaeus’ plea: “*Have mercy on me*!” But faith was the form of his plea: *“Jesus, Son of David!”* Do you have such faith – faith enough to persistently call on the name of Jesus for help or mercy in dealing with the dilemmas in your life? Or are you more likely to be one of those in the crowd – quiet and urging others to be quiet as well? Do you ever pray or call on the name of Jesus – or do you just go it alone? Jesus invites us to pray, urges us to pray, encourages us to pray, not out of obligation but out of opportunity to unload some of the baggage we carry day to day. “*Come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest*,” he says. The burdens may be very personal or global; they may torment you through the day, disturb your sleep at night, or just wear you down with their unrelenting weight. News feeds are full of such burdens which they lay on you – cataclysmic consequences of the presidential election, escalating conflict in the Middle East and Ukraine, the remnants of long-Covid, a doctor’s dire diagnosis. “*Come to me, and I will give you rest*,” Jesus says. We crave rest from those burdens, and it is rest from those burdens that he offers. If we will just come to him… But do you?

The burdens that Bartimaeus carried were blindness and poverty. The name Bartimaeus is a Greek name, but Scottish pastor Scott Mckenna notes that in Aramaic, the name Bartimaeus is *Barteymah*, which means *son of poverty*.[[1]](#endnote-1) Mark emphasizes that name in his text – *Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus.* Perhaps his name carries that additional layer of meaning – a son of poverty, one who needed healing not only for his sight but also for his impoverished condition, and so he called out to Jesus, to the Son of David, to the Messiah – *Have mercy on me*!

In Greek the word for Messiah is *Christos* – Christ. Contrary to what some people believe, Christ is not Jesus’ last name. To say Jesus Christ or declare him Christ is to confirm what Bartimaeus said – knowingly or unknowingly – from the side of the road: Jesus is the Messiah of God. Israel had been waiting for that Messiah to appear for a long time; but the Messiah they expected was a conquering hero who would appear with an army of angels to rout the Romans and establish God’s Kingdom on earth – not unlike what some now expect upon Jesus’ return. Jesus was not that kind of Messiah! He was the kind of Messiah who would heal the sick and restore sight to the blind and offer forgiveness for sins and proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand; instead of an army of angels he had a ragtag bunch of disciples. He came, not to be served but to serve; in humility and love to be a suffering servant. Most folks did not expect such a Messiah, and perhaps neither did Bartimaeus, but without seeing Jesus or hearing him, he called to him: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*

If you were standing beside Bartimaeus, and he turned to you to ask, “Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?” what would you say? Would you tell him, “He is the messiah!” or would you say something else, you who come here week in and week out to sing your praises and raise your prayers and listen to yet another sermon from a bald-headed preacher? Would you say Jesus is a teacher, a healer, an exemplar of faith and faithfulness, a good man among good men, or something more? Do you say he is the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God who takes away the sins of the world? It is perhaps the most basic question of our Christian faith and of your personal faith. Who do you say Jesus is?

If you do not turn to him in your prayers, perhaps it is because you are not sure how to answer that question about who he is. For two thousand years a host of gospel writers and letter writers, preachers and theologians, saints and repentant sinners, hymn writers and charter members of this church, and folks in these pews week to week have borne witness to their belief: Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior! We are here because some of those in that great cloud of witnesses shared with us the story of Jesus; they believed it was good news worth sharing. Like those in the crowd who encouraged Bartimaeus to go to Jesus when he called him, those saints in our midst encourage us to go to Jesus as well. We may not fully grasp all that Jesus is and what it means to say that he is the Messiah, but we need grasp only enough for what he means for us – the One who saves us and bids us come and unload the burdens we carry and follow him! “*Take heart! Get up! He is calling you!*” said the crowd to Bartimaeus. And those saints among us say the same to us! “*Take heart! Get up! He is calling you!*”

Bartimaeus took heart and got up – “*sprang up*,” writes Mark – and went to Jesus who then posed to Bartimaeus a life-changing question: *What do you want me to do for you*? To anyone else, Bartimaeus might have said, “Can you spare a few coins for a meal.” But to Jesus he said, “*My Rabbouni, my teacher, let me see again.*” In that request was an expression of faith, for who would ask for healing unless he believed that such healing was possible? He wouldn’t ask it of you or me! But he did ask it of Jesus, and so found healing for his body and his spirit; he was blind but after his encounter with Jesus he could see – and he followed Jesus on the way. It is a great miracle story, but it is also a great story of faith of a man who seemingly had no rational reason to believe, but did – and because he did, he found his life changed!

*What do you want me to do for you?* It is the question Jesus poses to all of us. Do you want healing for your body, soul, or spirit, or do you want healing for someone you love? Do you want insight, inspiration, or a little wisdom for a decision you have to make? Do you want a little more faith, a little more patience, a little more peace for your soul? Or do you want a little less anxiety, a little less turmoil, a few less doubts in your life? Do you want forgiveness for yesterday’s sins, strength for the challenges of today, or hope for the days to come? What is it that you want from Jesus?

There is a prayer from an unknown Confederate soldier in which he gives voice to what he wanted and what he received. He writes:

*I asked God for strength that I might achieve;*

*I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.*

*I asked for health, that I might do greater things;*

*I was given infirmity that I might do better things.*

*I asked for riches, that I might be happy;*

*I was given poverty, that I might be wise.*

*I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;*

*I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.*

*I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;*

*I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.*

*I got nothing that I asked for – but everything I had hoped for.*

*Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.*

*I am among all men, most richly blessed.*[[2]](#endnote-2)

“What then do you want?” asks Jesus. Perhaps like that Confederate soldier to be blessed; despite ourselves, to be so richly blessed! Amen

1. Scott McKenna, “We Are Made Whole” in *Life and Work* [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Quoted by John Sonnenday in the Immanuel Presbyterian Church newsletter, July 28, 1997 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)