

**Pentecost 22, Proper 25B**  
**Mark 10:46-52**

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**October 25, 2015**

### **Problem in the Text**

When I was at seminary, a woman who specialized in Biblical story-telling came to campus and presented the Gospel of Mark as a spoken work from memory. Some scholars think Mark's Gospel may have been originally an oral tradition – told to groups of people by the itinerant evangelist and written down at a later date. It would have been something like a newspaper boy calling out the headlines – but imagine the news lasting over two hours. Mark's Gospel style has immediacy to it, a spark of excitement that lends itself to being presented live to an audience.

In the story for today, we are drawn into the vivid scene of a crowd at the gates of Jericho as Jesus and his disciples are leaving the city. Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was left out of the throng of people following Jesus because he is blind. He was rooted to the place at the side of the road which he probably had claimed over many years of begging as people passed him to enter Jericho to shop or do business – their pockets still full.

He may have been blind and a beggar, but Bartimaeus was not a fool. Jesus and his companions were leaving the city, so there would have been no expectation from Bartimaeus of a handout. But what was his expectation? What did he ask for that day from the one whom everyone was crowding around in excitement – the “Son of David,” this Jesus who might be the heir to the throne of ancient promise? He didn't call out his usual, “can you spare some change?” He didn't lay out his everyday need as he might to someone who slowed down, “I have a family and we are hungry, can you give us a little to help?” He didn't stay quietly seated, wrapped in his filthy cloak with his cardboard sign propped against a hopeful bowl, “I am a blind veteran, I need help.” This time, with this person Jesus who was passing by, Bartimaeus called out, got up, cast off his cloak, and begged for mercy.

### **Problem in the World**

I want you to imagine that we are all sitting and listening to an itinerant story-teller, perhaps an old man named Mark who has come into our neighborhood, and we are hearing him tell this story about Bartimaeus as if it were a particularly juicy episode of the Good Wife, or perhaps someone re-telling the play-by-play of the 2006 Rose Bowl when Texas beat USC in one of the most memorable college football games of all time. (Okay, that was for my husband – maybe that doesn't sound as epic here – perhaps I should have gone with a Nats reference?) But you get the idea – this is a really vivid story. As we listen to Mark tell us about this blind beggar, where are you in the story? Are you someone in the crowd watching this unfold, watching as others try to quiet him? Or are you irritated that he is shouting, “Son of David, have mercy on me?” Were you next to Bartimaeus, telling him to be quiet? Are you one of the disciples? Are you relaying to this man the message of Jesus, saying to Bartimaeus, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you?”

Or are you Bartimaeus? Did you suddenly feel that you wanted to cry out for mercy too? Did you share his desire for mercy, for some kind of radical change in your life? Did you want Jesus' attention? Do you share this blind man's thrill and expectation as he cast off his cloak and approached Jesus?

A good story will draw you in like this – they are meant to change our perspective and feel what the characters feel, to sympathize with them in a way that the story changes who we are. I had a similar experience when I viewed the video: *‘What if it were you?’ Responding to the refugee crisis in Italy*. I found this video embedded in the Episcopal News Service article, *Suffragan Bishops visit Rome's Joel Nafuma Refugee Center*. Our very own suffragan bishop, Bishop Susan Goff was one of over a dozen bishops who attended a retreat in Rome. The news story is about the bishops' meeting with the refugees who are served by a mission of St. Paul's Episcopal Church each day. A safe place to learn English and Italian, to have a hot meal, and to learn about programs to help newcomers from Africa, South America, and the Middle East integrate into European society.

The video begins with a small rubber boat crowded with over two dozen men, women and children as they approach the pebbled Italian shore. It is a cold grey day. As the boat comes ashore, Christians meet them with water, food, blankets, and hugs. As the newly arrived disembark onto the shore, it struck me that one of the women in the boat was wearing exactly what I would wear for such a crossing, clothing I have in my own home: jeans, hiking boots, a fleece jacket and a down vest. In response to the kindness of the greeters, the refugees were telling their harrowing stories of what they had escaped on the other side of the Mediterranean. I was suddenly in the story – I felt their fear and their relief as they were each in turn given a hand to steady them as they stepped ashore. I could imagine as if I were one of them, the feeling of expecting more disaster but finding kindness. Where would you be in that story? As their very arrival is a way of begging for mercy, I ask you, who has access to God’s mercy? Who has access to our mercy, in Christ’s name? Where was Christ in this story – was he on the shore? Or was he in the boat? I think we once heard Jesus say that as we do to the least of these, we do to him.

### **Grace in the Text**

Bartimaeus, the blind man, cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” When the disciples told him Jesus wanted to see him, when “they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” Bartimaeus threw “off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.” Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus and proclaimed his identity loudly. He had caught onto the new promise of the kingship of the Son of David – a hope for mercy and healing. He was not going to let that opportunity pass him by. “Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.” In his encounter with Jesus, Bartimaeus found the mercy that led him into new life – a life he could only dream of as he sat year after year begging at the gates of Jericho. When he met Jesus he found healing and an opportunity to gain his dignity and to live by honest work instead of the humiliation of begging. Offered this new beginning, Bartimaeus began to follow Jesus.

### **Grace in the World**

As you hear of Bartimaeus, do you dream of what your new beginning would be? What if you had the opportunity to cast off the cloak that binds you to your old self and you could encounter Jesus face to face? If you could cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” What are you begging for mercy for? The good news is that you do have that opportunity. You can follow the example of Bartimaeus and receive healing and forgiveness. You may have already had that experience of feeling new life beginning after an encounter with Jesus. Once you have received that love and mercy from Christ, then you have become a disciple. You now have the beautiful task of telling Bartimaeus and all who are like him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”

You can join the people on the shore in Italy who have no fear of welcoming the stranger, the one who is begging for mercy while others are telling them to be still and to be quiet. “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” You can be the one in your corner of the world who shines the light of mercy, healing, light and new life to those who have lost hope, to those who feel mercy is not for them. Where will you be in the story to come? You may take many roles over time – as the one who begs for mercy, as the one who tries to quiet the noisy begging, as the one who says “take heart; get up, he is calling you,” or even as the one who in Christ’s name offers mercy and healing to the beggar. Those are all roles we play at different times in our lives. The important thing, the essential message, is that the story is for you to enter.

Mark has invited each of us to come meet Jesus. “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”

Amen.