

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road. (Mark 10:46-52)

A joke that never seems to get old in comic circles is about helping someone move. It’s an old gag, and an understandable one. The last thing people want to do is spend one of their precious days off driving around, lifting heavy objects, and unpacking a seemingly endless number of boxes. Often times helping a friend or neighbor move is hard, thankless work, with the only rewards being a sense of gratitude and maybe some pizza. Advertising companies have taken this angle too, and have used the “helping someone move” gag as a punchline that is easily understood by almost everyone. The joke is funny because whenever helping someone move is brought up, people always seem to find a cheap excuse to get out of helping. “Oh help you move? Uhh... sorry my cousin’s cat died. I’m helping them out right now.” “Need help moving? Sorry man I pulled a muscle in my hand the other day. Maybe ask so and so if they’ll help?” The list of cheap excuses goes on and on. That situation of someone needing help but having nothing to offer reminds me a lot of our text for today. When a blind beggar named Bartimaeus called out to Jesus for help, he didn’t have a thing to offer him. He was relying solely on the mercy of Jesus for his cry for help to be heard. Bartimaeus faced doubt and resistance from those around him and likely from within himself too. And in the same way we will struggle with these challenges as well. But scripture gives us a powerful reassurance: Jesus has mercy on us, and when we call, we can know that he will answer.

In our text for today it is a very charged atmosphere. Mark tells us: “Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging.” Jesus had

been in Judea for a time, and had generated a sizable crowd. He was on his final journey into Jerusalem. I'm sure there was a lot of excitement among the disciples as well.

As they were coming back out, we first hear of Bartimaeus. All we know of him is his name, and that he was a blind beggar. Like all beggars he had nothing, and he relied solely on the kindness of others to feed him. It was just a regular day for him, until he hears that Jesus is coming.

When Bartimaeus hears who it is, he immediately begins to call out: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Take note of the words he uses here. Bartimaeus knew not only who this Jesus of Nazareth was, but that he was the Messiah, the heir to David's throne. Bartimaeus, who was unable to see with his human eyes, saw instead with eyes of faith something that Jesus' disciples weren't able to. He saw Jesus as the promised Lord from David's line who had come to set his people free.

Because of this, deep down he knew Jesus would be able to help him. Word of Jesus' miracles and healings had spread across Judea, and Bartimaeus had taken faith in them. Something I find interesting is how he doesn't call out for any one thing in particular. He simply cries out for mercy. This ordinary cry from a beggar, one he would use every day, suddenly took on a more potent meaning. The Spirit had convicted in him a sincere belief that Jesus had the power to save him, and that prompted his cries for mercy to the Son of David.

Bartimaeus was overjoyed at the prospect of receiving his sight. So, he screams out for Jesus to notice him. Yet for some reason, the crowd tries to shush him. Mark tells us here "Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet." Rebuked him! For asking for help! Such arrogance! Did they think that they were better than Bartimaeus? Or did they perhaps greedily want all of Jesus attention for themselves?

And think of Bartimaeus too. Had he listened to them, the cold reality of his situation might have sunk in. He was a simple blind beggar. Why would Jesus listen to the likes of him? Why did he deserve the attention of the mighty son of David above everyone else in the crowd?

But once again we see a mighty testament to Bartimaeus' faith. In the face of this adversity, he cries out all the more: "Have mercy on me!" This blind beggar had true insight, which gave him hope to continue to cry out. He knew that Jesus was the merciful Messiah who would respond to him. And while he had every reason to doubt, deep down he was right. Jesus had no reason to

respond to his cries. But Bartimaeus believed that Jesus would have mercy on him. Because he took his eyes off of his own sinful self and put them instead upon Jesus, that gave him the courage to cry out to the merciful Messiah.

But in this whole account, I found myself asking “where do I fit in here?” When we look at this account, where do you see yourself fitting in? Are you one of the disciples, gladly following Jesus and learning from him? Are you one of the crowd, rebuking Bartimaeus for his cries of mercy to Jesus? Or are you Bartimaeus, calling out to Jesus for mercy in the face of such stiff adversity? As much as we would like to say we’re sitting with Bartimaeus, calling out to Jesus in the face of doubt and uncertainty, how true is that?

Our sinful nature likes to make us think we’re strong in our faith, but is that really how it is? How many times have you been in tough situations and doubted that your prayers were being heard? Worse still, how many times have you stopped praying entirely? This shows time and again how we fail to place our full trust in God. That cold creeping fear of uncertainty slowly seeps in, choking our faith and making us wonder if our prayers are effective. That old enemy Satan, with his evil mask of guilt makes us think that our prayers go unanswered as punishment from God. Or he tries to convict us of our unworthiness. He points us to our sin, making us doubt if we’re even capable of approaching God.

Or like in the text with the crowd rebuking Bartimaeus, Satan takes on a different approach, sending pointed barbs of doubt and uncertainty at us from the outside. We see the world not believe at all in what God has promised us, and that tempts us to doubt God along with them. We see people mocking and rebuking us for believing in a bunch of “made up stories” from 2000 years ago. “You still believe in those old myths and legends? What’s wrong with you? We have modern science to tell us all the answers. Stop believing in those ridiculous stories and join the modern world!” We are seen as backwards, old-fashioned, and bigoted against people, which discourages us and makes us timid to talk about our faith. With these sins of weakness, we are shown to be unworthy to approach God. And the cold hard reality is, that’s true.

Deep down you and I are just like Bartimaeus: hapless beggars without anything of beauty or worth to attract Jesus to us. No matter what we do, no matter how good we do it, nothing comes

close to what God demands of us. Isaiah tells us even our most pure and righteous works are like filthy rags. And so, we start to wither at the jeers of Satan. “Just shut up! Can’t you see he’s above you? Why do you persist in this pointless rambling at the sky? You aren’t worth Jesus’ time!”

But when things seem darkest, that still small voice of faith planted deep in our hearts at our baptism pushes us to keep praying. “Louder! He does hear you! He’s the savior! He has mercy enough to forgive you even here in the midst of your sins of doubt! Cry out to the Lord of mercy, the promised one of David! He’s come to save you from your sins!” And so, we like Bartimaeus continue to cry out, louder still in the face of persecution and doubt. Because even when we feel like we are unworthy and unable to approach God, he comes to us in the midst of our hardships and reassures us with the promise of his forgiveness!

The fact that we are beggars prompts us not to shut up. The fact that we are beggars moves us to cry out all the more, because we know we have nothing, and that Jesus completes us. We realize the more we take our eyes off ourselves, the bolder we become. Because Jesus has mercy on us, we know that we can call on him, and that he will answer. But we still have more to learn from Bartimaeus’ example.

Bartimaeus heard the cries of those around him, telling him to shut up because he wasn’t worth Jesus’ time. Yet Jesus knew otherwise. Jesus stops in his tracks and calls out to Bartimaeus. Mark says: “Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ So they called to the blind man, ‘Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.’ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.” Isn’t it ironic how the crowd, which was so eager to reprimand Bartimaeus for his faith, eagerly encourages him to his feet to go and meet his savior? Bartimaeus leaps to his feet, casting aside his cloak (quite possible his only earthly possession) and running to his savior.

Standing before Jesus, Bartimaeus’ heart must’ve been racing. There he stood in front of *Jesus*, the only one able to answer his cries for mercy and heal him. It’s so cool too, how Jesus in his omniscience knew exactly what Bartimaeus wanted, yet he still gave him the chance to speak his mind. Mark gives us Jesus’ words here: “‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him. The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see.’” I love here how Jesus gives Bartimaeus the

opportunity to speak for himself. In his omniscience Jesus undoubtedly knew exactly what Bartimaeus wanted and what would happen. Yet despite this, Jesus allowed Bartimaeus to approach him and speak to him. This shows how our merciful Savior loves us, and welcomes us to speak to him, regardless of our situation.

Here Bartimaeus speaks in loving and reverent tones, addressing Jesus as *Raboni*: “Dear teacher.” This is a beautiful and unique word. It is only used 2 times in the New Testament: here and when Mary Magdalene addresses Jesus as “dear teacher” outside the empty tomb. This shows the emotion and excitement that Bartimaeus was feeling here. And merciful Jesus grants Bartimaeus’ request. I can imagine Jesus’ face splitting into a wide smile here, and that smile being the first thing Bartimaeus saw with his restored vision.

That was all it took for Bartimaeus. With that simple request fulfilled, Jesus sends him away. Mark gives us the words of Jesus here in all their beautiful simplicity: “Go. Your faith has healed you.” Jesus saw that the faith in Bartimaeus’ heart had withstood the harsh persecution and adversity of his own sinful conscience and the world. This wasn’t some mystical healing, powered by the strength of Bartimaeus’ faith. It was a true faith focused not on the result of the healing, but on Jesus. Bartimaeus knew that Jesus was God, and that he was capable of whatever he desired. This faith, that was so powerfully shown in Bartimaeus, brought him the mercy he so desperately wished for. In the same way, faith brings us the mercy we need as well.

Just like Bartimaeus was powerless to restore his vision, so we are powerless to bring ourselves closer to God. Just like Bartimaeus knew that Jesus was the savior he needed to both restore his vision and to set him free from the bondage of sin, by God’s grace so do we. And just like Bartimaeus called out for God’s mercy in the face of doubt, so do we. Even when the opposition is fierce, we know that Jesus is faithful, and he will come to us with his mercy. There is nothing good in us, but Jesus comes to us anyway, giving us the forgiveness that we so desperately need. That’s why we almost always start Sunday worship with the confession of sins. We admit to God that we are fully and completely unable to do anything for ourselves. Therefore, we kneel at the foot of the cross, crying out to God for mercy and knowing that his grace abounds. By looking to God’s mercy, we acknowledge that we are powerless, but accept that he is powerful, and he will

save us. And in response to prayer, Jesus comes to us every day. In word and sacrament, he descends to us, continuing to give us his mercy.

Bartimaeus was a strong character, and we can learn from him. But we have to remember he was also a sinner. Like us, he was imperfect, and needed a perfect savior to help him. So, while this text features a man having his vision restored, that isn't the main focus of this text. It's about a strong savior who took mercy on a sinful man who had nothing to offer but a pleading cry for mercy. God's mercy is boundless, and there is more than enough for beggars like you and me. It's so easy to doubt in ourselves because of our own weakness. Yet when your faith seems to shrink, and the devil tries to feed your insecurities, cry out to Jesus. He is the savior, and he loves us so very deeply. He died for us, granting us the gift of heaven forever. And in his mercy, he continues to walk with us and encourage and strengthen us every step of the way. Even though we have only the pleading cry of "have mercy on me" to offer, Jesus listens to us. Call on Jesus, and he will answer. Amen.