

Asking Jesus, Pt. 4
Have Mercy on Me!
Mark 10: 46-52

**First Presbyterian Church
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Once again, we'll work through the five steps of our *Asking Jesus* work.

1) Prayer and the Story. Jesus had set his face to go to Jerusalem, even though there he would meet rejection, trial and even death. Along the way from the north country to Jerusalem, travelers passed through Jericho. Thanks to plentiful springs of fresh water, the city was an oasis in the desert, and attracted many of the rich and powerful during winter months. Jericho was the last stop for pilgrims going to Jerusalem and so the roads were busy. Travelers and merchants, givers and takers, hustlers and beggars all interacted. We've asked for the Holy Spirit to enlighten us. We've read the story and so now we can identify two requests made of Jesus as he left Jericho: "Have mercy on me!" and "Let me recover my sight." So let's move on to step 2.



2) Who's Asking? Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus made his way along the road with a great crowd around him. Along the roadside there sat a blind beggar. His name was Bartimaeus. "Bar" means son. Just to be sure we get this, Mark tells us that Bartimaeus was the son of a guy named Timaeus. It's a bit of overkill. Like saying "This guy is Smithson, the son of Smith." He didn't really have a distinct name of his own. Rather, his affliction defined him. He was Bartimaeus the Blind Man. Such a person would sit by the busier roadsides, begging for cash. He would spread open his cloak to catch coins

tossed carelessly his way. The daily humiliation of sitting, pleading, waiting and depending comprised his life. On a day when Jesus was passing by, normal people would view Bartimaeus as a nuisance. Especially when he started bellowing for mercy.

3) The Question Within the Question. Every day as read a new gospel story, we identify what the person was really requesting. We want to know their real agenda. But in this story, nothing is hidden. Bartimaeus cries out the deepest human request of God. “Have mercy! Look upon me and see how it is with me. See me, see my condition. Regard me. Then be merciful. Pour out grace and kindness.”

Bartimaeus was blind, but not deaf, neither physically nor spiritually. He had heard the talk about Jesus, the rabbi from Nazareth who forgave sinners and healed the sick. Maybe Jesus could heal him too. So Bartimaeus shouted to be heard above the din. As a beggar, he was used to raw asking. Now he was all the more urgent because this man could give him more than coins. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” This is primal prayer. It sounds a lot like the famous Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This prayer has led Christians for centuries to a deep place of intimacy, faith and trust in Christ. In the same way, Bartimaeus’ prayer takes us right to the heart of human longing. He cried forth faith that the very nature of our God is merciful.

Bartimaeus appealed to the heart of the God of Scripture. For example, Moses longed to know God more directly. He yearned to partake of more of his glory. In reply, the LORD I AM hid Moses in the cleft of a rock, and passed by, proclaiming the truth of his own divine name: “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity...” (Ex. 34: 6-7, NKJV). God’s very nature is to show overflowing mercy. Love, mercy, faithfulness, goodness and salvation are wound together in the heart of God. Bartimaeus cried out to this God and would not be silenced. He clamored for Jesus, the promised Christ, David’s heir and God’s only begotten Son. Though physically blind, Bartimaeus could spiritually see who Jesus is. If Jesus would only notice him, he could be healed.

Let’s take a moment to make some connections. Perhaps you’ve

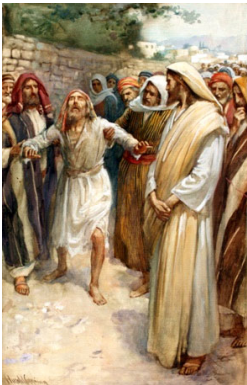
known what it is to be reduced to some description of yourself. The label becomes the main way people regard you. By body type, IQ, physical coordination, facial features, race, neighborhood, school, amount of money, or attractiveness meter. We've heard these since we were kids. There's four-eyes. Or, that's the slow kid: he never can finish his work on time. Oh, she's always been the awkward one in our family: just doesn't fit in. He's the shy brother: can't get a word out of him. She was our little accident. Hey, put him in right field, maybe no one will hit it there. She's the faller in the family: the one who just can't make it. He's the perpetual loser: that guy is a walking disaster. Whatever it is, we become the label.

Maybe you know what it's like to feel that your particular weakness, your wound, your great mistake, your secret shame is actually on display for people all the time. That everyone is sizing you up and judging you and would really rather you just went away. You think, "They all know I don't deserve to be here. I'm not pretty enough to be with these people. I'm not smart enough to hang with this crowd. I'm not spiritual enough for this church. I only pretend. They're going to catch on." It can seem there is nothing more to you than the damning labels: Divorced. Felon. Adulterer. Spinster. DUI. Bankrupt. Fired. Application Rejected. Maybe you've been living for scraps. A moment of attention in the desert of your loneliness. A kind word thrown like a coin into the lake of your insecurity. One friend who could give you one hour when you don't feel so self-conscious. One win in a perpetually losing season of life. Like Bartimaeus, you spend your days hoping someone will throw you something you don't deserve but desperately need.

Jesus was passing by and hope leapt up in Bartimaeus. He cried out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The people, though, tried to shut him up. Not now! You're not worthy. This is no time for beggars and losers. You're embarrassing us. Stay in your place and keep quiet. But blind begging Bartimaeus had nothing to lose. What worse could happen? He shouted out all the more for mercy.



4) Jesus' Reply. And Jesus stopped. He heard that voice above all the others clamoring for him. He saw the man on the roadside. Suddenly the crowd got quiet. What would he do? Jesus spoke, "Call him." That guy. Bring him here. That's the one I want. Call *him*." The people immediately changed their tune. From telling Bart to shut up to encouraging him. They said, "Take heart, he is calling you!" Jesus stopped, listened, noticed, and then summoned the least worthy, most needy person in the crowd. "I want *that* guy."



Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, sprang up and made his way towards the sound of Jesus' voice. We can't miss how dramatic this was. People in those days wore a close fitting inner garment and then a long cloak over that. Such a cloak would serve the poor as a blanket. And would serve a beggar as a way to collect coins. The blind man would sit with his cloak spread out to catch any money thrown his way. His cloak was the tool of his trade. Bartimaeus did not stop to neatly stack his coins. He leapt up, out of his cloak, and plunged into the crowd. If this didn't work, his cloak and his coins would be gone. He'd be back on the roadside in desperate straits.

Then, surprisingly, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Was that a necessary question? Isn't it pretty obvious what a blind

beggar wants from the great healer? But Jesus' immensely dignified the man with his question. One, he did not make patronizing assumptions, the way we so often make assumptions about people who are poor, or disabled, or needy in anyway. Because, two, Jesus did not identify the man by his blindness. His disability was not the most important thing about him. Neither was blindness the deepest need Bartimaeus had. And three, Jesus asked Bartimaeus to express his desire. Jesus valued the longings, wishes, desires and hopes inside this unique and precious individual. He didn't look at Bartimaeus and see just a blind man reduced to begging. Though everyone else told Bartimaeus to shut up and considered him a nuisance, Jesus invited him to speak.

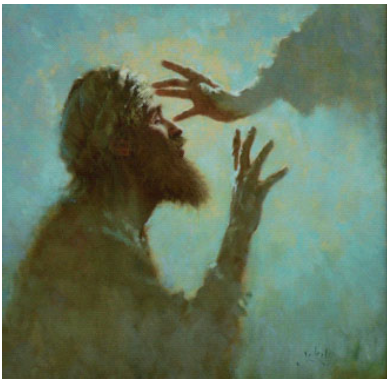
Doesn't your heart leap to continue the connections? Here we are, roadside beggars. We've been defined by blows and wounds, by limitations and defects, by mistakes and blunders. People wish we would go away or at least keep quiet. And Jesus stops and says, "Call him. Call her. That's the one I want. The blind one. The needy one. The begging one. The one from the discard pile. The one from the scrap heap. The one with no future. The annoying one. Call him."

Here's the wonder of his love. Jesus could have called to Bartimaeus himself. But he gave that task to his disciples. He let them make the connection. And that thrills me this morning. For these few minutes, I get to be Christ's spokesman. "Take heart, he is calling you." Seriously. Jesus calls you. Right now. To himself. He called you here this morning. He passes through this crowd, just as he promised to do whenever we gather in his name. He sends his Holy Spirit to your hearts with news. *I see you. I hear you. Come to me. You're the one that I want.* Not the prepared and composed you, the one you present to the world. The needy you. The blind you. The discarded you. The fearful you. The unworthy you. The regretful you. The begging for scraps and expecting a kick you. He calls *you*.

Jesus hears your heart cries. When all strategies fail. All pretense blows away. All reasons to commend you are dismissed. Below all that precarious house of cards that is your life. Jesus sees you and he hears you. You drop your pride. You let down your guard. Your heart cries for mercy: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He replies, "I do. Come here. I

call you to myself.”

5) Our response. Bartimaeus sprang up with joy, coins falling everywhere. No turning back now. So, too, you leap up, just like you feel your heart beating now with the possibility. Jesus wants me! He wants me with him this very second! I can leave behind all the old ways of getting along in the world. All the begging for scraps. All the expectations that leftovers are what I deserve. No, Jesus has more. Spring up and go to him. Go all in and risk everything on him,



Then Jesus asks you, so tenderly, “What do you want me to do for you?” What do you really want? It’s important to get this right, because we could so easily miss the point. We could get the order of things wrong and end up empty.

Jesus is not Santa Claus. He’s not a genie who comes out of the bottle to grant us wishes for life the way we want it. He only rarely removes our disabilities in this lifetime. He does not erase the memory of our wounds or their scars. Rather he transforms their effect in our lives. He turns ashes into beauty. He makes the ways we have been pierced into channels for his love. It seemed like all our life drained out of those holes when we got hurt. But Jesus uses them as the very channels into which he pours his merciful love. And he keeps the channels open so that his merciful love can flow back out toward others. We get to go call others who have been sidelined and discarded back into his saving presence.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus already had what he most deeply wanted. Mercy. Compassion. Regard. Jesus wanted Bartimaeus with him. Jesus valued him. He took him out of the gutter and into his embrace. This connection of mercy is what mattered most. The

healing of his physical sight simply followed the opening of his eyes to Christ's accepting, cleansing, restoring love.

Sure, Jesus could have waved his hand as he passed and Bartimaeus could have regained physical sight with no personal connection. But we all know that sighted life without Jesus is no life. Riches without Jesus are no life. Power of kings and admiration of celebrities without Jesus are no life. Jesus made us to know him and be known by him. It's the hands in this picture by Brian Jekel that tell the tale. Jesus reaches towards Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus reaches toward Jesus. Love flows between them. Life begins anew. Mercy reigns. The mercy of Christ's desire for us. *He really wants you with him.* The mercy that he clears the way for us. He parts the crowd. He erases the old identity markers. He cleanses the sins and the mistakes. He tends the wounds.

Whatever stage of life you are in, hear the news. Jesus calls you. This moment. Ever onward. Ever deeper. Ever more truly. Take heart, he is calling you right now. Will you move towards him? Are you ready to say, "What I want is for you to want me to be with you. I know this life is hard. I know I will die. I know you do not remove every trial. But if I could know you want me, the real me, the blind beggar me, I would go to you. I would be in your arms. Ransomed, freed, restored, forgiven. And it would be enough. Oh, more than enough." Dear ones, it's true. In his name I declare to you with all my heart the truth of this statement. Take heart, he calls you. As we pray, won't you let your soul get up and go to meet him?

Artwork:

- 1) Carl Bloch, Danish, d. 1890
- 2) Anonymous, Italian School, 17th c.
- 3) Harold Copping, English 1910.
- 4) Brian Jekel, American, 2008

