

WE ARE BEGGARS

Mark 10:46-52

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost (Series B; Proper 25)

October 24, 2021

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson for the Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 10, verses 46 through 52. In this gospel lesson, a blind man sees more than what most others see. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 10, beginning at verse 46, we read in Jesus' name.

⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho. And 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.

⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸ And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." ⁵⁰ And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." ⁵² And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Wir sind bettler. Hoc est verum." Part German, part Latin, it means, "We are beggars. This is true." Those were the last written words of Martin Luther before he died in 1546. The American Edition of his written works, when it's finally completed, will be at least seventy-nine volumes. So the man wrote a few words. But as he lay on his death bed, he wrote just six. Then he rested. "We are beggars. This is true."

This is the Christian life. This is faith. This is worship. We are beggars.

Christianity has been mocked as a religion for the weak. It's called a crutch. And they know this is true, because you can rearrange the letters in "church," and it almost spells "crutch." They say Christianity is a crutch to help weak people cope with life. They give us too much credit. A crutch helps you get by on your own. But we don't just need help. We need a Savior. We need mercy. A crutch isn't enough. We are beggars. This is true.

This is the Christian life. Faith is knowing who to beg to. Worship is begging our Lord for forgiveness. We are beggars.

Obviously this text is about Jesus. It's about his power and mercy. Jesus is the hero of the story. But I'm also fascinated by the blind man, Bartimaeus. He's kind of the supporting hero. He is a picture of faith for us. He's a beggar who knows who to beg to.

The first interesting thing about him is that we know his name, along with other identifiable information. There are a handful of people like this in the gospels, beside, of course, the twelve

WE ARE BEGGARS (Mark 10:46-52)

apostles. We also know of Joseph of Arimathea, who was a member of the council; Nicodemus, who was also a ruler of the Jews; and Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, probably in Capernaum. These were wealthy or otherwise prominent people. And there are also ordinary or even poor people, like Simon of Cyrene; Mary from Magdala; Martha, Mary, and Lazarus from Bethany; and this guy, Bartimaeus of Jericho, the son of Timaeus.

These names, along with other identifiable information, are historical marks of authenticity. A modern scholar by the name of Richard Bauckham argues quite convincingly that these named people in the gospels are not just witnesses of the events they are named in, but were also among those who saw Jesus alive after his resurrection (*Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*). The idea is that the gospel writers name them because they are known people in the early church. They would have been among the first Christians in Israel, those whom Jesus appeared to after his resurrection.

And it's significant that we have their names, along with other identifiable information. This guy isn't some random Bartimaeus. We know his father's name, we know where he used to sit and beg, and we know that he used to be blind. Now, someone like Bartimaeus isn't going to show up in other historical documents from that time period, but he would have been known at the time. Someone from Jericho could say, "Yeah, I remember that guy," or, "No, there was never a beggar here by that name," or even, "Yeah, I know that guy, but he's still blind." Mark says enough about the guy to make the story falsifiable. You could fact-check the thing. That's the value of falsifiable claims, and the gospels are filled with them.

It's also interesting that this blind beggar becomes a model of faith. At that point in Israel's history, they believed that wealth and good health were signs of God's favor. Being poor or having some kind of disability were signs that you must have sinned in some way. Bartimaeus is both of these things. He's blind, and he's poor. He's a blind beggar. But he sees more than most people do. And for this reason he is held up as a model of faith. "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27).

If you've been here the last few weeks, you might remember the rich man whom Jesus spoke with earlier in chapter 10(17-22). There's a great contrast between that rich man and Bartimaeus. They are opposites in almost every way. By all appearances, the rich man seemed like a good guy. He kept God's commandments (10:20), and, as a reward, God made him rich. Or, at least, that's how it looked. Bartimaeus was blind and poor. People assumed he deserved his lot in life. The rich man called Jesus "good teacher" (10:17). Bartimaeus calls him "Son of David" (10:47). The rich man asked Jesus what he must do (10:17). Bartimaeus begs for mercy (10:47). At the end of his encounter with Jesus, the rich man went away sad (10:22). At the end of Bartimaeus' encounter with Jesus, he follows Jesus. And I assume he did it quite joyfully. The rich man's god was his possessions. But Bartimaeus' God is Jesus. Everything that goes wrong with the rich man goes right with Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus is just sitting there, presumably begging from travelers as they go by, when he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is coming. Apparently Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus, and he believed. So he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (10:48). People rebuked him and tried to silence him. Why? *Because he must have been a sinner. Why should Jesus bother with this guy?* But Bartimaeus continues. Mark records his words one more time, but the way he writes it indicates that Bartimaeus was crying out over and over again. "Son of David, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me!"

WE ARE BEGGARS (Mark 10:46-52)

By calling Jesus, “Son of David,” Bartimaeus was confessing that Jesus is the Christ, or in Hebrew, “Messiah.” In 2 Samuel 7, the LORD promised David a kingdom that would be established forever. So the people of God in the Old Testament and at the time of Jesus were waiting for this descendant of David who would be established as the eternal king. That’s the promise of the Messiah, or the Christ, the Son of David. Bartimaeus was confessing Jesus to be the Christ and asking him for mercy.

We’re going to play “Which Commandment?” with this. That’s the game where we try to determine which commandment, or commandments, are at work. You can find the Ten Commandments, along with the catechism’s explanations, on page 95 of the hymnal. So which commandment is at work in Bartimaeus’ plea, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” I’ll give you one right answer. The First Commandment applies to everything, so that’s one of the right answers. But there is another commandment that is more specific to what Bartimaeus is doing. And I’ll give you a couple hints. First, when we play this game, it’s not always a matter of someone breaking the commandment. Sometimes they’re keeping it. Second, every commandment protects some gift God has given to us. So there is a gift God has given that Bartimaeus is using correctly. Make your final answer. What commandment is Bartimaeus keeping by using God’s gift correctly?

Ready? It’s the Second Commandment, “You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain” (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11). Bartimaeus is not breaking this commandment, but keeping it. The Second Commandment protects the gift of God’s Name. There is a wrong way to use God’s Name and a right way. The catechism explains it this way: “We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, conjure, lie, or deceive by His Name.” That’s the negative side. Here comes the positive side: “... but call upon Him in every time of need and worship Him with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.” Bartimaeus used the name of God, “Jesus, Son of David,” to call upon him in his time of need. That is precisely why God has given his name to us. This is worship: that we call upon Jesus, seeking his mercy. And Scripture promises, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13; Joel 2:32).

So Jesus summons Bartimaeus to come over to him on the road. And he asks him, “**What do you want me to do for you?**” (10:51). This might seem like a silly question. *The guy’s blind. He wants you to heal him.* But it’s not always that obvious. How often does a beggar ask for a miracle? Suppose you pull up to that stop sign by Sam’s Club. You know the one I’m talking about. There’s almost always a beggar there. You roll down your window and ask the guy, “What do you want me to do for you?” And he says, “Let me recover my sight.” You’d say, “Who do you think I am? I can’t do that.” No. Usually they ask for any cash you can spare. That’s what beggars are asking for.

So Jesus asks, “**What do you want me to do for you?**” in order to flush out what Bartimaeus really believes about him. Does he see the Son of David as a wealthy and powerful king who can set him up with a nice financial gift? Or does he see the Son of David as really being the Son of God, who can heal his eyes. Despite his blindness, Bartimaeus already sees Jesus for who he really is. So he begs for his sight. Jesus’ question, “**What do you want?**” invokes a confession of faith. And then Jesus grants what the blind man asked for.

We see here that prayer is a confession of faith. Bartimaeus prayed according to who he believed Jesus is and what he believed Jesus could do. We do the same thing. Who do you

WE ARE BEGGARS (Mark 10:46-52)

believe Jesus is? What do you believe he can do? The answers to these questions shape our prayers. Do we pray for things in this life only? If so, our confession of faith is limited to the First Article of the Creed, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” That’s a great thing to confess, but there’s more. Do we pray also for forgiveness? If so, we are confessing the Second Article of the Creed, that Jesus is the Savior of the world, who was crucified for us and rose again from the dead. And do we pray for the Holy Spirit to teach us and preserve us in the faith? Now we’re confessing the Third Article of the Creed. Our prayers are a confession of faith. When we ask God for something, we are confessing, first, that he possesses the power to do it, and second, that he is gracious enough to do it. We confess our faith, and we worship God, when we pray. Or maybe we just don’t pray much at all. What do we confess by that?

So Jesus invokes a confession of faith by asking Bartimaeus what his prayer is. Bartimaeus prays a good confession, and Jesus grants what he asked. “Immediately he recovered his sight and followed [Jesus] on the way” (10:52). Now this might be the greatest contrast to the rich man. Jesus told the rich man to follow him, but he did not. Jesus didn’t have to tell Bartimaeus to follow him. He told him to go his way. But for Bartimaeus, his way was now following Jesus. He saw with his physical eyes what the eyes of faith already saw. He saw Jesus as his God, and he followed him.

I’ve mentioned several times recently that Jesus is on a journey in this portion of Mark. You might wonder when I’m going to stop reminding you of that. The answer is “now.” This is the last time I’ll remind you of the journey, because this is the last stop, or at least the last one Mark tells us about. After Jericho, there are just twelve miles to get to Jerusalem. The next thing we read about is Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a small donkey while crowds cheer and praise him (11:1-10). That’s the crowd Bartimaeus joined. And that was Palm Sunday, the first day of what we call Holy Week.

The whole point of the journey was to get to Jerusalem and the cross his Father was preparing for Jesus there. Imagine what Bartimaeus saw with his newly restored eyes that week. On Sunday, crowds waved palm branches and rejoiced. But on Friday, Jesus was placed on trial, condemned, mocked, beaten, crucified, died, and was buried. Then on the next Sunday he appeared alive again. Jesus gave Bartimaeus eyes to see his salvation. He didn’t just see again. He saw the greatest thing ever.

If I had a time machine, I would go back and watch those events with my own eyes. People say that seeing is believing. But that’s not really true. Bartimaeus must have seen all those things. But that’s not why he believed. He believed when he couldn’t see anything. He heard about Jesus and believed. “Faith comes by hearing” (Rom. 10:17).

We are beggars. This is true, right? Think about this. Answer it for yourself. Are you a beggar? That’s why we’re here. Are we here to give something to God? Do we need to earn some attendance points? Does he need to hear from us? Or do we need to receive from him? We came here to beg. When we pray, we pray the prayers of beggars. When we sing, we sing the songs of beggars. When we confess our sin, we confess that we are beggars who need his mercy. And when we confess our faith, we confess that he has the goods we need. We are beggars. And this is good, because our Lord Jesus Christ is merciful to beggars.

He invites you to call upon his Name. He welcomes beggars to ask for little things and big things. And he always answers mercifully. “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will

WE ARE BEGGARS (Mark 10:46-52)

be saved.” We are beggars. This is true. And this is good, because your Lord Jesus Christ is merciful to beggars. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.