

## Ya Gotta Ask for It!

Mark 10:46-52

Real men don't practice religion -- not tough guys -- at least that's the history! Church is for women and children. Isn't that what you've heard? But why has Christianity gotten that rap? God told Job to stand up "like a man!" Blind Bartimaeus had to speak out for himself and Jesus made him articulate what it was he wanted. According to these stories, it takes some courage for people to deal with God. So what have we missed? Is Christianity a soft religion or is it tough? We're going to find out by reexamining Jesus' encounter with the blind beggar, what that encounter means for us today, and then consider if we really want a faith that requires some fortitude to practice.

The Jesus community was coming to town, coming to Jericho. It was the last stop for pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem -- to the temple. Jesus was coming to town, to Bart's home town -- at least through town. And Bart would be ready. Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was blind and a beggar. That combination virtually assured that he was destitute, with almost no possessions. Even his name was borrowed. Bar Timaeus simply means son of Timaeus. We know nothing of his family or his father, but we do know his situation and it was not good.

Jericho was a company town. That company was the pilgrimage trade -- just one day's journey (15 miles) from Jerusalem all up hill. Eager pilgrims came through Jericho and turned the corner. On the way out of town, they went through beggar's row with pockets full of money, spirits filled with religious piety, and hearts overflowing with pity and not a little guilt. Jericho was a good place to beg, but the son of Timaeus was looking for something other than money from Jesus. What was he wanting?

You remember what happened as Jesus was coming by. Everyone wanted a piece of him. Lots of beggars were seeking handouts and charity -- a way to make it through the day, but bar Timaeus screamed loudly, at the top of his lungs. His voice cut through the crowd and he succeeded in making himself a nuisance -- a remarkable feat in a crowd that must have been noisy beyond belief! Some tried to quiet him, to hush him up, but he yelled out all the louder, "Son of David, *kyrie eleison!* Have mercy on me!" "Son of David, have pity on me!" "Son of David, have mercy..." And Jesus stopped. He stood still. Was he curious? Irritated? Annoyed? Moved with compassion?

We just don't know, but Jesus stopped and said, "call him here." The same people who tried to hush up that blind beggar now told him, "He's calling you. Go!" And bar Timaeus did not waste a second. He threw off his cloak, jumped to his feet, and came to Jesus. He didn't have to ask directions. No one needed to help him. He knew what he wanted, who could help him, and he went there. And Jesus asked him, "What do you want?" It was not money and not pity. There was no hesitation: "I want to see."

What's going on in this story behind the scenes that we might easily miss? This is the last healing story in the Gospel of Mark, a book full of healing events that serve as a primary sign of the Kingdom of God. The story of this blind beggar is used here to contrast the story of the rich, young ruler whom Jesus offers healing of a different kind, telling him, "sell all you have, give to the poor, then come follow me." But the cost of healing was too high for that wealthy man. He thought he had too much to lose. But bar Timaeus was happy to pay the price. He had nothing to lose but his status as a beggar and outcast, ritually unclean, and discarded by God. He had everything to gain along with his sight. He had the opportunity to rejoin his community: the

religious community and the cultural community. He had the opportunity to assume the responsibility to work for a living rather than beg.

It was often those with nothing to lose who followed Jesus because he asked them to choose to value God's values above all. That was not so big a step with nothing to lose. It was much bigger for those with wealth, status, reputation, careers, and more to lose. It is the same tension in which we live our lives today. We face the same choices: "What do you want?"

Bar Timaeus said instantly, "I want to see." Jesus told him, "Your faith has healed you, has made you whole." And he followed Jesus -- one of the many poor and outcast who joined Jesus on the way to Jerusalem. The contrast was stark. Those with everything turn away. They have too much to lose. Those with nothing follow on the way. They have everything to gain. Remember Jesus' own disciples grumbled over their status -- which of them would be honored and given special privilege by Jesus. But the blind beggar only wanted to see and to follow.

As with so many accounts of Jesus' encounters told in the gospels, the healing of the blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, is told more for how it serves to tell the larger story of Jesus' mission than for its historical accuracy. Yet it may well reflect an actual healing encounter on the eve of Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem and the culmination of his life and ministry. It may also have had a poignant meaning for the gospel writer to fit the precise spiritual need of Mark's community "to see again the main theme of his gospel -- the glory and the triumph of Jesus through the apparent disaster and defeat" of his crucifixion. ("Mark," *The Anchor Bible*, C. S. Mann, 421)

The outcasts who came to Jesus stand in contrast to the wealthy who either opposed Jesus or whose discipleship was conditional or secretive. The challenge and message is for those of us today who want to follow, but also want to play it safe, hedge our bets, and hang on to familiar and comfortable privileges. We are hesitant to take up our cross. But the invitation is to choose to see clearly, choose to follow Jesus. Though the way can look difficult and daunting, it is the safest way, the surest way to life that is abundant.

So, do you really want faith that requires some fortitude to practice? Bartimaeus is an example to us. He put himself in a position to be seen by Jesus. He put himself in a position to be heard by Jesus. And when that fateful moment arrived, he chose what to say to Jesus. People hide from Jesus. We hide from ourselves. Like the old shell game, we divert our gaze and distract ourselves. We hide from God's sight like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but there is no hiding from God -- no hiding from ourselves. So the opportunity comes. The fateful moment comes by our choice or God's choice or fate. We are in a position to be seen, to be heard by the elemental power of the universe.

What will we choose to say? Lots of people asked for healing from Jesus. And if they didn't ask, he asked them, "What do you want?" A lot of us like the idea that we don't have to ask -- that God already knows. Isn't that the definition of God? The promise of faith is this: the healing we seek is in us already, but we have to ask for the healing we want. We have to put ourselves in a position for faith to make us whole. If we don't ask for it, we won't recognize it. When it comes, we won't know what we have and it will be wasted on us.

Bartimaeus is an example to us of boldness born of desperation. He cried out making his needs and wants known to Jesus. And when asked, knew right away: "I want to see again." And Jesus told him, "Your faith has made you whole." And to us, "what do we want?" "What do you want your life to be?" At some point, *ya gotta ask* for the healing you want. *Ya gotta own* your dream.

The Spirit is always asking us, "What do you want for your life? Who do you want to be? What do you want for this congregation?"

About six years ago, during a Crossroads Church annual retreat, a small breakout group was discussing the issue of whether we should try to buy own building? Should we enter into a capital campaign to raise money? The concern was raised, "can we afford to do this?" Then almost instantly, there was clarify in response, "We can't afford not to do this." The result is this building that is housing so much of our ministry and programming. The capital fund is vital now to helping us pay our mortgage.

The question faces all of us who follow Jesus: "Can we afford to do this -- whatever this is?" "Can I afford to do this" is not just a one-time question and not just a question about money. Can you afford to clarify and follow your dream? Can you afford not to? Can you afford to search and seek to discover a calling for your life – to embrace your unique giftedness as a human being and then do it -- live it out?

I wrote this week in my *E-notes* about the challenge of this journey. When taken seriously, it can bring a sense of crisis in our lives. I remembered hearing that the Chinese character for our word *crisis* is composed of two characters representing *danger* and *opportunity*. That is a great thought except that a crisis in Chinese is much like a crisis in English. The danger part is quite real. What has been called opportunity is really more like an "incipient moment, a dangerous moment, a time when things start to go awry. This is *not* a juncture when one goes looking for advantages and benefits. In a crisis, one wants above all to save one's skin and neck!" Of course, dangerous moments are when things can fall apart. They are also times when fundamental change can happen and the *new* can begin. Victor Mair, <http://pinyin.info/chinese/crisis.html>.

It is usually no fun to go through times of crisis, but they can be transitional opportunities for our lives. I had a friend who was a pastoral counselor. He told me that no one ever came to see him professionally because they wanted to grow. They came because they were in pain and wanted the pain to stop! A few would continue to work on their growth: to find themselves, their passion, and their call. The key is what you do when the pain has stopped. The temptation is to return to what is familiar and comfortable. It takes a lot of time and effort for most of us to know what we want in life beyond our immediate needs. Once those immediate needs are met and we are more comfortable, then the question begins to gnaw: "What else is there?" With that incessant gnawing comes the Spirit's invitation to discover and commit to what is calling us: our passion, our work, and our true joy.

This is the journey we're on here at Crossroads. It is the journey many of you have taken on in your lives: to discover or confess what you want above all else and to give yourself to your dream. As I told you last week, I think I've always known what I wanted -- my passion for life. It is my dream to embrace healing and wholeness in my life and to be a source of healing for others through the words I write and speak and through the shared life of Christian community. It is my dream for this congregation to hold open space in which healing can be embraced for all people; for this congregation to accept the call of the Spirit for this building to be a house of prayer for all people – "like a healing stream in a barren desert, a gentle rain on a thirsty garden, [moving] through our lives to coax a new creation." (Bruce Harding, "Like a Healing Stream," 2003)

Those who are hungry for healing will come to find the presence of the Spirit through this community: through our openness to all people, our willingness to ask and encourage challenging questions, our embracing of differences of thought and perspective -- through our

hospitality and acceptance, and our commitment to lifestyles of justice, peace, and compassion so that in your faces and mine they will see the face of Jesus.

Most of us know our dreams deep down inside. We know they're ours, but there is a resistance to articulate them. There is hesitation – maybe a fear of not surviving? Maybe it's a fear of displeasing someone else that leads us to resist claiming our dreams as our own. But we have far less to lose by living this way than by giving in to fear or social pressure.

[We] must give up everything in order to gain everything. What must [we] give up? All that is not truly [us]; all that [we] have chosen without choosing and value without evaluating, accepting because of someone else's judgment rather than [our] own; all [the] self-doubt that keeps [us] from trusting and loving [ourselves] or other human beings. What will [we] gain? Only [our] own true selves who [are] at peace, who [are] able to truly love and be loved, [our true selves] who understand who and what [we are] meant for. But you can be yourself only if you are no one else. You must give up "their" approval, whoever they are, and look to yourself for evaluation of success and failure in terms of your own level of aspiration that is consistent with your values. Nothing is simpler and nothing is more difficult. (Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *Death: the Final Stage of Growth*, 165)

But when you do it, you will discover the true meaning of "your faith has made you whole." When we as a congregation follow our dream -- own our calling and giftedness -- and live it, do it, then we'll discover that our faith makes us whole. We cannot afford *not* to live this way. This is how to follow Jesus and and this is our calling, to follow Jesus on the way.