

Sermon for July 26, 2015 – 9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost\*

Mark 10:46-52 (NIV 84)

Theme: **We are all beggars.**

- 1) *Let us cry to Jesus for mercy!*
- 2) *Let us respond to His summons of grace!*

<sup>46</sup> Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>48</sup> Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup> Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” <sup>50</sup> Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” <sup>52</sup> “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

One of the most deceptive ideas the human heart can conceive is the thought that we are masters of our own fate. If we succeed, then it’s kudos for us for working hard to get what we want. If we fail, then shame on us for not doing what we needed to do to succeed. This is how the sinful world views life on this earth.

But, when sudden disaster strikes, how quickly people realize that they are not the “masters” they once thought they were. All that we have and are can be wiped out in an instant. No, we are not in control of our lives: God is. Without his blessing we have nothing. Without his mercy we are lost.

As we will learn in our sermon for today: **We are all beggars before God!** May this truth move us to cry to Jesus for mercy! May this truth move us to respond to His summons of grace.

Part One: Let us cry to Jesus for mercy.

Our sermon text took place shortly before holy week. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem one last time where he would be hailed as the Messiah on Palm Sunday and crucified like a criminal on Good Friday.

On the way to Jerusalem he passed through Jericho. We read: *As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging.*

The visually impaired of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine did not have the modern aids that many enjoy today: like guide dogs, speaking traffic lights or even braille. Practically no one would hire them for work – leaving them to beg for their daily bread. To add insult to injury, the blind also lived under the stigma that their blindness was God’s punishment for some sin that either they or their ancestors committed.

These were the conditions under which Bartimaeus lived. He understood first hand that he was not the master of his own fate. He was a beggar whose life totally depended on the mercy of others.

But as blind as Bartimaeus was, there was one thing that, by God’s grace, He could see more clearly than almost anyone else. He heard people talk about Jesus’ teachings and miracles. While the majority could not comprehend who Nazarene was, Bartimaeus understood the truth. He believed Jesus to be the Messiah: the very “son” the LORD promised King David so long ago, who would establish an eternal kingdom of

peace and rescue His people from the misery that sin's curse has caused.

No, Bartimaeus didn't know exactly how David's greater Son would accomplish these things, or what his kingdom would look like – all this was yet to be revealed in the future. All he knew was that the LORD promised a Savior, and that Jesus was the one!

This is why, when Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by, *he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: spiritually speaking, we are all like Bartimaeus. The Scriptures proclaim that all people are completely helpless - possessing no ability to save themselves. We are blind beggars before God; we can do nothing but plead for his pity. And it is good for us to realize it. Why? Because if we don't acknowledge this truth about ourselves, then we won't cry out to Jesus for mercy while he is near!

Even though Bartimaeus wisely called to Jesus for mercy, *Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet.* Why? Truth be told: we don't know. There are, however, two lessons we can learn from this incident.

First of all there are times when we Christians are tempted to act like the crowd did towards Bartimaeus. A person may come to us for help but, instead of letting the light of God's love shine forth in our words and actions, we dismiss the person outright – telling them to be on their way. And even if we do help, we sometimes do it in such a rushed, uncaring way that we prevent them from seeing Jesus. May the LORD forgive us for any time we have acted this way!

Another lesson we can learn from how the crowd treated Bartimaeus is that the world hates it when we confess Christ. It can not stand our expressions of faith. This wicked world tries to do all it can to silence the Gospel – making us feel foolish and ashamed for our cries to the LORD; just like the crowd did to Bartimaeus.

What should we do when we are tempted to feel this way? Should we keep quiet and try our best not to make other people uncomfortable with how we express our faith? Consider what Bartimaeus did when the crowd told him to be quiet: *he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

Bartimaeus didn't care what the world thought about him. The only thought that occupied his mind is that Jesus – his merciful Savior – was near! He couldn't let this opportunity pass by. Fully recognizing that he in no way could help himself, he opened his mouth to His loving Savior to be merciful to him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: learn from blind Bartimaeus' example and do not let the opportunity to call on the LORD for mercy pass you by. Now is your time of grace on this earth. Now your Savior is near. Don't worry about what people will think: how your friends and coworkers might make fun of you for being a "religious nut". Who cares what they think – they are just as blind and helpless as we are. Keep on calling to your LORD for mercy, and He will help you: for as you call out to him in faith, he hears, and summons you to receive his grace.

### Part Two: *Let us respond to His summons of grace!*

What was Jesus response to Bartimaeus' call? He was moved to such mercy that he even sent the very crowd that rebuked Bartimaeus to summon him. We read: *Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."*

Even though there are times when we feel as if Jesus doesn't hear our pleas for help, the Bible tells us that he knows every one of them. He always gives the prayers of his believers his fullest attention, and sends

other Christians to encourage them with their words and actions.

The LORD might not do this immediately for us, but he will do it in His good and gracious time – just like He did for blind Bartimaeus. We read: *So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.”*

Can you picture the joy the crowd brought Bartimaeus when they shared Jesus’ summons? You, dear Christian, can offer your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ that same joy. God wants you to be like the crowd: telling those crying out for His mercy to cheer up, that their Savior hears them and will meet with them in His Word and Sacraments

How did Bartimaeus respond? We read: *Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.*

The cloak Bartimaeus threw aside was most likely folded on his lap in a way to receive any alms people gave him. Notice that, once Jesus called him, his care for worldly things was gone. He recklessly threw aside his earthly possessions and ran to Jesus who he knew could give him everything he needed and more!

Learn from Bartimaeus to cast aside anything that might hinder you from coming to Jesus. The wealth and security this world offers is a pittance in comparison with the salvation and blessings Jesus wants to give you. Trusting in His grace, be ready leave all to blindly run to your Savior who freely offers you more than you can ever imagine.

*“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi (an Aramaic term meaning, “my master”) I want to see.”* Now think about this for a moment. Bartimaeus is asking Jesus to do something that only God can do. Doesn’t this tell you something about his faith? He was so convinced that Jesus, as the Messiah, had such divine power and love that He could ask him the impossible – no matter how foolish it sounded to those around him.

And Bartimaeus was right to ask. Jesus was so pleased with Bartimaeus’ trust in him that He made a public example of it. After Jesus touched his eyes and spoke the word, Bartimaeus received his sight<sup>1</sup>. And having given Bartimaeus his sight, Jesus said: *“Go. . . your faith has healed you.”* A more literal translation of Jesus’ words would be: “your faith has saved you.”

Now understand Jesus’ statement correctly: He does not mean to say that Bartimaeus’ faith caused his healing in the sense that faith healers claim today. Their preaching makes it seem like you can make God do whatever you want by believing – and if you didn’t get what you want, it’s because you didn’t believe enough. Such theology is work-righteous and wrong!

No, when Jesus told Bartimaeus “your faith has saved you,” it was as if Jesus was saying: “You were absolutely right to trust in me Bartimaeus. I truly am the promised son of David – the Messiah who has come to save. I heard how the crowd tried to stop your prayers for mercy, but you were right to continue crying out– trusting that I would answer. Your faith saved you because it brought you here to receive my grace!”

And what was Bartimaeus’ response to this? We read that he *followed Jesus along the road*. Remember what I said at the beginning of this sermon? Jesus’ road led to Jerusalem. It led to the cross. Bartimaeus was happy to follow Jesus as a disciple – publicly proclaiming his salvation regardless of the persecution and shame he might have to bear from the world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Whether we realize it or not, we are all beggars before God. In and of ourselves, none of us possess the righteousness we need to stand before Him. We are totally dependent on

his mercy and forgiveness. Let this truth move us to continually cry to Jesus for compassion – not letting the world's harassment stop us. Let us also respond to the summons to come before Him to receive his promised grace.

And where do we meet Jesus? We meet him in his Word and sacraments! It is through these means alone that He stands ready to open our eyes and shower us with His grace and every blessing. He forgives our sins, strengthens our faith and wraps us in his righteousness. Jesus reveals God to us to such a degree that we are no longer blind beggars, but seeing sons of God who have been given the privilege of witnessing his Gospel in the world!

Yes, **We are all beggars before God!** *May this truth move us to cry to Jesus for mercy! May this truth move us to respond to His summons of grace. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. Matthew 20:34 & Luke 18:42