

**Sunday October 28<sup>th</sup> 2018 Ordinary 30****Gospel Reading:****Mark 10:46-52** Blind Bartimaeus**Reflection**

My friend Bartimaeus led a comfortable life – of sorts. True, it was different to the past – the time *before* the darkness descended. Well, back then he had been a respected citizen - supporting himself, with good family and friends. Strange how misfortune sorts out who your real friends are. Not many of the old friends stuck by Bart when the darkness came into his life – but *I'd* known him since childhood. We had played together, learned the Torah together (Bart had been a far better synagogue pupil than me – he listened well – he was curious.....and passionate about the stories of our faith).

His father Timaeus & my father were best friends. Our families supported each other along the way. I hadn't the heart to walk away from him, just because of his misfortune – even though, to be honest, he seemed to have brought it on himself. Hard to believe he was now reduced to a begging bowl – the old Bart would *never* have accepted that fate.

Still, there he was, living a comfortable life in our rather fashionable area - the community ensuring that his daily physical needs were met. After all, it was *our* honourable duty as pious Jews to give alms to those in need.

But Bart *had* changed. He was quiet now – not communicating much, except for occasional outbursts of anger. He had withdrawn into himself with the darkness – like an old date palm no longer bearing much fruit.

That is, until the day of the Nazarene's visit. Jericho was buzzing. We'd all heard of his healing powers. There was talk of miracles and challenging the authorities – some even said he was the promised One. I'd wanted to get a closer look at this man as he left town, but I needed to stay close to Bart – his darkness left him particularly vulnerable in the excited crowd. As Jesus drew near and the buzz intensified, I became aware of Bart's agitation. I

couldn't understand it – I thought the Nazarene looked a very ordinary man, no different to his rather rough band of disciples.

Suddenly there was an explosion beside me: “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*”

“*Wow! That's a bit rich*” I rasped at Bart but *my* words were swamped by the loud rebuke from the men walking with Jesus. “*Quiet!*” they yelled.

But there was no stopping my friend now – again he exploded (louder than before): “*Son of David, have mercy on me!*”

Suddenly Jesus stopped, turned our way....I saw him speak to his men.

A knot of anxiety clenched my gut (after all, Bart had identified this Nazarene as Son of David – suggested that he was the Messiah!), but another part of me was excited – delighted – a hint of the old Bart had returned – passion, energy, life!

Next thing we knew, the men were calling and gesturing: “*Take heart; get up, he is calling you.*”

Well - *they* soon changed their tune – if nothing else, this Jesus had the power to change the hearts of his men!

In an instant Bart leapt to his feet and flung aside his cloak, grabbing at my arm with a grip I hadn't felt for years. His energy drove *me* forward through the crowd until we arrived in front of the Nazarene. I caught my breath as he glanced at me, and then looked into the eyes of my friend – his gaze deep - seeking, piercing..... “*What do you want me to do for you?*” he asked.

“*Rabbi, let me see again*” was Bart's immediate, impassioned response.

Everything seemed to stop – time itself paused, eternity hung in their gaze. My friend's grip was electric, his face alive with expectation. As I watched the face of Jesus, his lips curved into a smile, his eyes lit with burning warmth as he responded: “*Go; your faith has made you well.*”

I can't fully explain what happened that day, but as Jesus continued on the way, I knew *I* was changed and my friend had regained his fuller life. The darkness had lifted. In the presence of Jesus, Bartimaeus had courageously confronted himself, presented his darkness, his defilement & shame and found his lost honour and dignity. He was back on track. Faith – Jesus called it. *“Go on the way. Your faith has made you well.”*

Jesus said ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Be persistent, and you will receive the Holy Spirit from our Father in Heaven. That sounds simple and wonderful, but sometimes, it can seem so much harder than that. When our relationship with God seems distant, and our spiritual life feels dry, when life seems more like a burden and less like a gift, it's easy to believe that all our seeking is going nowhere. Something gets in the way.

Bartimaeus sat in darkness, with a begging bowl his constant companion.

I wonder what makes up our daily begging bowls? Perhaps 'Can't do' attitudes or lack of self-esteem? Ambivalence, dependencies, insecurity?

If we're seeking to know God, then the direction to go is down into our own depths and resting in stillness, knock at the door of our own heart. Christ is waiting there for us, but our hearts may be too wounded to recognize him. Like Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Easter Sunday, the disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, the pair of disciples on the road to Emmaus, or the disciples by the Lake of Tiberias we can have trouble recognizing Jesus, our hearts clouded by things like fear, anger, anguish, grief, or hurtful stories we tell about ourselves..

But something made Blind Bartimaeus set aside his begging bowl and from the very depths of his being, call out to Jesus in an explosion of energy. He recognized his need. And he then recognized the One who could meet it. The surrounding men's eventual response was interesting: *“Take heart”* they said *“get up, he is calling you.”*

Bartimaeus took his heart, open and ready, to the One who awaited him.

*“What do you want me to do for you?”* Jesus asked.

The story of blind Bartimaeus is immediately preceded by the story of James and John who asked Jesus to choose the two of them to be seated at his right hand and left hand in glory.

Jesus asked both James and John the IDENTICAL question he asked blind Bartimaeus:

*“What do you want me to do for you?”* James and John were spiritually blind; and when their story was over, they were *still* spiritually blind. Bartimaeus was physically blind; but when his story was over, Bartimaeus could see.

*“What do you want me to do for you?”* Jesus also asks us?..... how might we respond?

God – grant us the courage of Bartimaeus – the courage to identify what blinds us to your way – the courage to step beyond comfortable darkness and take responsibility for our growth – the courage to call out to you, even in the midst of discouragement and rejection – May we, like Bartimaeus, take heart and leap to your call, (discarding the proverbial begging bowls that diminish us), knowing that nothing can separate us from your healing love.

Amen.

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