

As we get closer and closer to Jerusalem and the end of Jesus' public ministry according to Mark, we can look back and see how Mark's Gospel is full of surprises:

- Jesus gets baptized by John, when John thinks Jesus ought to be baptizing him.
- Jesus passes along the Sea of Galilee, calls some unlikely religious types (9 fishermen) to follow him, and immediately, they leave homes and bright but wet futures to go with him. They follow, with no questions asked.
- Next, Jesus violates the law by touching a leper, and then heals the man of an almost incurable disease instantly.
- Cherished Sabbath regulations get broken repeatedly over small things, such as plucking heads of grain.
- A furious storm gets stilled. The dead are raised to life.

Do these signs bring the most likely people to faith? Hardly. The Guardians of the community's faith think Jesus is in league with the devil. Parables about farmers scattering seeds indiscriminately on untilled ground and little seeds turning into huge shrubs both entice and confuse.

Thinking his homefolk will welcome him as a hero, Jesus unceremoniously gets the boot.

Thousands are fed from a single picnic basket.

He's transfigured into light and called the "Beloved Son" by the voice from the cloud.

Greatness in discipleship is portrayed not in terms of wealth or political power but in littleness, be it in the image of a child or the role of a servant.

Jesus tells the disciples that they will go to Jerusalem, not to rule but to suffer, and that he will give his life as a ransom for many.

The Gospel is full of surprises, twists and turns that always keep us a little off balance.

The last become 1<sup>st</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> become last.

As Fred Borsh wrote: "In the kingdom of God, things do not work out the way one might expect. Impossible things happen to improbable people." Amen to that.

And nowhere is this truer than today. Jesus is on what amounts to a death march. Jericho is the last stop before The Final Curtain; Jerusalem and the Cross lie only 15 miles away. This is not the time you would think that Jesus would hear the cry of another's need. Rather, you'd expect him: to be caught up in the last hurrah of the pilgrimage;

or focused on putting the finishing touches on his career-ending speech;

or rehearsing how he was going to deal with Pilate or Caiaphas.

But Jesus remains, even on his way to death, the man for others.

A. W. Tozer once wrote: “An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of himself as fully as if there were no others.” Bartimaeus, “son of Timaeus,” is one of those needy children. And Jesus somehow, over the clamor and the crowd, gets it. The Gospel is full of surprises.

The healing of Bartimaeus is a story rich in teachings. A quick bit of background, and then a thought or two.

Mark never tells us how this man lost his sight. All we know is that the light went out and darkness came in. And his life changed forever.

As a successful beggar, Bartimaeus knew that the optimum time to “make hay” was around the festival of Passover. As Christmas is to the Salvation Army, Passover was to the needy in and outside of Jerusalem. Pilgrims from all points of the compass would be descending on the city; and, more than at any other time, they would feel soft-hearted toward the poor. So Bartimaeus, this day, set up shop early. With no wealth, no status, no authority, no rights or privileges, in fact regarded by most as punished by God by virtue of being blind, he offers no worldly reason for anyone to stop, save for the season and whatever winsome personality he has.

1<sup>st</sup> Teaching from 10:49: God is never too busy to attend to us. We might be too busy in our harried and hustled lives for God, but She is never too preoccupied or remote or important or distracted to see to our needs. We may not always get the answer or response we're hoping for, but God is always there. He loves us that much.

Russell Mase, who was at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian in Naples, FL, in the mid-90s, told a story of Gaylord Kambarami working for the Bible Society in Zimbabwe. One day he tried to give a man a New Testament, saying "Read this, and you will find joy and meaning."

"I will not," said the man, "and if you force it on me, I will use its pages to roll my cigarettes."

Years later, while giving a lecture, this same man spotted Kambarami in the audience. Pointing to him, he said, "15 years ago this man gave me a New Testament, and I warned him I would use its pages to roll cigarettes with. And so I did. I smoked my way thru MT, and I smoked MK and LK as well. But when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke any more."

What's the verse say? "For God so loved the world ..." The God who loves us so much that he gave his Son is never too busy to pay attention.

2<sup>nd</sup> Teaching from 10:48: It doesn't count off to be strong-willed, stubborn and persistent when dealing with God. Frederick Buechner wrote this about prayer. Quote. Thoughts worth heeding.

3<sup>rd</sup> Teaching from 10:50: "Throwing off his cloak" is a display of faith as extraordinary as any in the New Testament. That cloak was almost certainly Bartimaeus' only possession. It served as the receptacle into which people would pitch their coins. Looking and smelling unhygienic, he would spread that cloak over his crossed legs to catch the cash thrown his way.

In the Greek, the phrase has implications of casting away something much more. There's a sense in which Bartimaeus "throws off" his old life so that he might put on a new one, like shedding an exoskeleton. It's the same for us. We must give up that which impedes or holds us back – old grudges, slights and sins – in order to embrace the new life of grace. We must come to Jesus and put our trust in him and his ways, not in the devices and desires of our own hearts, if we want wholeness and holiness. And for those who put their faith in Jesus with something of the same intensity as Bartimaeus, they are always changed, made more pleasing in the eyes of God.

4<sup>th</sup> Teaching from 10:51: Jesus' answer to Bartimaeus is the same as the one he gave to James and John earlier in the chapter when they were

angling for seats at his right and left hands. There is great irony in this.

They've been with Jesus all along yet are spiritually blind. Blind

Bartimaeus hears Jesus passing by and "sees" who he is – the Son of God and Lord of Life.

Don't be too quick to think that just because you are regular in church and do your best to obey all the rules that you've got a lock on the Kingdom. Remember, the satisfied and secure in themselves have as much chance of entering the Kingdom as a camel has of getting thru the eye of a needle. It's those:

who desperately want to escape darkness and the shadow side of life;

who realize there is no way on their own to get out of this world  
alive;

who recognize that without a true Shepherd they are but lamb chops  
for the next tempting wolf;

who, left to their own means, will stumble thru life with no clear  
purpose, fall victim to their own fears, and grope their way to a confused &  
bad end;

who come to the light.

In his autobiography, Night, Elie Wiesel tells of growing up in a village in Hungary before being sent to a Nazi concentration camp. As a boy he befriended Moshe, the poor man who cleaned his synagogue. One

day Moshe saw Elie in the synagogue praying. Moshe asked him, “Why do you pray?” He then proceeded to tell Elie the way of questions. “Every question possesses a power that does not lie in the answer. Humans raise themselves to God by the questions they ask.”

Elie then asked, “And why do you pray, Moshe?”

“I pray,” said Moshe, “that God will give me the strength to ask him the right questions.”

The conclusive proof of Bartimaeus’ healing, and not just his curing, is when MK says that he followed Jesus on the way (10:52). Because of Jesus, he has changed life direction. He has a new focus, a new center of gravity. He does:

what the homefolk in Nazareth refused to do;

what the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida refused to do;

what the would-be disciple who had to bury his father refused to do;

alas, what Jerusalem, the City of God, refused to do.

He follows Jesus.

He has known loss. Now Bartimaeus gains it all. Do you see what the story means?