

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 10/24/2021



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary Year B

Sunday, October 24th

Mark 10:46-52

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Finally, someone gets it!

This week's Gospel lection closes the central section of Mark's Gospel. As discussed over the previous weeks, this section begins with the two-stage healing of another blind man in 8:22-26. It covers Jesus' attempts at explaining His role as the Messiah and clarifying the Kingdom to His confused disciples. The closing story of blind Bartimaeus stands in stark contrast to the confusion demonstrated by Jesus' disciples. The example of Bartimaeus is a culmination of the prior events in this central section. Now that our spiritual blindness has been removed, we are given a clear and concise revelation of exactly how one should respond to the call to discipleship.

Mark 10:46-52 Commentary

This is the final leg of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, and this will be Bartimaeus' last opportunity to encounter Jesus while He is on this Earth. The narrative begins with Bartimaeus sitting at the side of the road.

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!"

Mark has moved us at an intense pace to get to this point in his Gospel. This is the last story before the triumphant entry into Jerusalem where things begin to slow down. This story begins with a strange twist. First, the fact that the character is named at all makes this atypical. Furthermore, in Aramaic "bar" means "son of". So, the text actually reads, "...son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus..." Some argue that Timaeus may have been a reference to a historical person. Others make the link with Plato's *Timaeus*, a cosmological and theological treatise from c.360 BC where sight is considered the foundation of knowledge.

Regardless of the identity of Bartimaeus, when he hears Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he cried out his confession of Jesus as the Messiah. This is the first time Jesus is referred to as the Son of David. In a few verses Jesus will again receive a Davidic greeting from the crowds. The insight from Bartimaeus into Jesus' true identity is further confirmed in 12:35-37 when Jesus asks, "How can the scribes say that the Christ [Messiah] is the son of David?" The nature of Bartimaeus' confession is important. The Greek word used is *krazein*, the root of which means to cry out, to scream, to shriek, express deep emotion. This is clearly a very active rather than a passive expression of faith.

⁴⁸ *And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

We read in v.46 that Jesus is with His disciples and a great crowd. It is not clear from the text who rebuked Bartimaeus. It would not be the first time the disciples had rebuked people for trying to gain access to Jesus - earlier in the chapter Jesus rebukes the disciples for attempting to prevent the children from coming to Him (Mark 10:13-16). But this does not deter Bartimaeus. It only makes him more determined, and his persistence pays off.

And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. (vv. 49,50)

Jesus calls Bartimaeus. If we look at this through the lens of a call to discipleship, we see how Bartimaeus, who is physically blind but apparently not spiritually blind, casts off his worldly possessions, jumps up and comes to Jesus. There is no hint of procrastination here.

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.*

Jesus confronts Bartimaeus with the same question He asked James and John in last week's primary text (10:36): "What do you want me to do for you?" Unlike the two members of Jesus' inner circle using this question to request positions of honor and glory, Bartimaeus requests sight. Here the contrast between worldly and spiritual matters could not be greater. Bartimaeus recovers his sight immediately and we are told this is a result of his faith. Jesus tells Bartimaeus to be on his way and he chooses to follow Jesus. It is now that the call aspect of this story becomes clear. Bartimaeus has received the call to discipleship, he casts off his worldly possessions (10:50) and follows Jesus even though he sees where the path is heading. Bartimaeus thus fulfills Jesus' requirement specified in 8:34: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me".

Reflections

If the road is a metaphor for life, here is a man confined to the sidelines of the possibilities of life because of his blindness. The passage opens with Bartimaeus sitting *by* the road. After Bartimaeus encounters Jesus in faith, the story ends with Bartimaeus *on* the road. How many of us are still on the sidelines of life, the abundant life promised by Jesus (Mark 10:28-31; John 10:10), because we lack the faith to take Jesus at His word and follow Him with abandon? In a post-Christian society, how many of us are willing to express our faith as loudly as Bartimaeus (metaphorically speaking)? And when the world tells us to be quiet, are we willing to shout louder?

Mark once again encourages us to find ourselves in this story. Do we identify with Bartimaeus or with the people in Jesus' entourage, perhaps the disciples, seeing Bartimaeus as a nuisance and judge him to be someone who Jesus does not want to be bothered by? To put this into today's context, in a time of significant change within church and society, there is a danger that the local church can become so inwardly focused that, to all intents and purposes, the church becomes walled off from the very neighbors we are commanded by Jesus to love.

After this pericope, Mark's Gospel begins to slowdown yet this final text on discipleship has a feel of urgency about it. This would be Bartimaeus' final opportunity to encounter Jesus before His death and resurrection. Jesus was passing through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem and would not return this side of the cross. It is as though Bartimaeus could sense all of this. To what extent is there a feeling of such urgency in our churches and ministries? What did Bartimaeus know that we do not? To what extent are we ambling through our walk like Jesus' spiritually blind disciples, enjoying the status and attention?