

# Sermons at First Church

**A Ministry of the Word**  
**October 24, 2021**

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Clarksburg, WV**

**Rev. John F. Koerner**

**Mark 10:46-52**

*The blind man said to (Jesus), "My teacher, let me see again." (Mark 10:51 N.R.S.V.)*

## **Bartimaeus**

Let me introduce myself. My name is Bartimaeus. You may have heard of me. I am humbled and grateful that my name is mentioned briefly in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I am mentioned in all three as a blind beggar that Jesus healed. That I am mentioned at all is still astounding to me. I am not an important person. Still, there is so much more to my story. I hope that you will indulge me a little reminiscing.

I was not always blind. In fact, I had a pretty normal childhood. I was one of seven children. I was the oldest and without a doubt the most loudly stubborn of us all. Still my parents loved me and cared for me and all my brothers and sisters. When I was 12 years old, everything changed. My father died suddenly. And just like that we had no means of support.

Our various uncles split up the family amongst themselves. I went to live with Uncle Wilbur. Wilbur was a hard man. He was impossible to please. When I was born my mother named me David, after the great king. But I never used that name again after my father died. My uncle's favorite name for me was "worthless." He owned a pottery shop and he wanted me to help him around the shop. But I was no good at making pottery or even helping. I broke a lot of pottery. My uncle was always calling me worthless because of that. Sometimes when he was more mellow he would call me Timaeus' boy. That is what Bartimaeus means. Bar means son. So Bartimaeus means "son of Timaeus."

I liked it when people called me Bartimaeus. It was the one thing that I kept from my father. I was proud to be known as Timaeus' boy. Then late evening, I knocked over a whole stack of pottery on myself. I was knocked unconscious. When I came to again, I could not see.

After that living with my uncle was impossible. If I was worthless before, I was now labeled a terrible burden. Before long I ran away and took up life as a beggar on the streets. My uncle never came looking for me, I think he was all too happy to see me gone.

So I became a beggar on the streets of Jericho. It was a hard life. I stole. I lied. I begged for help and somehow I survived. I guess I was just too stubborn to die. And I learned how to be loud.

When people asked me my name, I always said Bartimaeus. It was that one bit of my father I held on to.

Yes, there were some kind people who gave me food and bits of discarded clothing. But most people just ignored me. For all practical purposes I became invisible. People didn't want to see me, because then they might feel like they needed to help me. It was easier to just ignore me. Have you ever felt like that? Like you were invisible? It is the most terrible feeling in the world.

So I became loud and obnoxious. Sometimes I even stuck my feet out to trip people who were walking by. Usually that resulted in them cussing me and kicking me, but even that was better than being invisible.

One day a kind stranger gave me my most prized possession. He gave me a warm cloak to wear. Actually it was a badly cured camel hide with the hair still on it. It smelled bad and the hair itched against my bare skin, but it was warm. It gets cold at night around Jericho. It is unbearably hot during the day, but at night it gets very cold. Beggars sometimes froze to death on the streets. So I was very grateful for my smelly old camel hide.

Some of the other beggars tried to buy it from me for a handful of food. But I always refused. Other beggars tried to steal it from me. It is hard for a blind man to keep others from stealing things. But I managed. When I slept, I was always on edge, vigilant. And during the day, I sat on my camel hide. I always knew where it was.

Then one day it happened. I had heard that there was a great healer in our land, his name was Jesus and he was of the lineage of King David. Some even said he was the long promised Messiah.

From the day I heard about him, I longed to meet Jesus. So I was on fire with excitement when I heard he was in the area. I learned from another beggar that he was going to be passing along the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. So I worked my way across town, and sat down beside the Jericho/Jerusalem road. I waited there a long time, but I could do that. I was used to waiting.

Finally came the news that Jesus was coming, he was coming! Even before he could possibly hear me, I began to shout for him. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." The people around me were embarrassed. They didn't want Jesus to notice the underside of their city. They ordered me to be silent. Some of them kicked me. I was used to that too.

I cried out all the louder. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." Suddenly the crowd around me went silent. I wasn't sure what had happened. I couldn't see. Then some kind soul whispered to me. "Take heart, he is calling you."

Then I heard it too. A warm, inviting voice said, "Come."

Quickly, I got to my feet and made my way toward him. Half way there I remembered that I had left my camel hide behind. But I wasn't about to go back for it. This was my chance to meet Jesus.

As I came closer, I heard that warm inviting voice again, "What do you want me to do for you?"

My experience as a beggar told me not to ask for something too big and risk being turned down. I thought about asking for a meal, or decent clothing, or just the chance to sit and talk with him a bit. But something whispered to my heart to have enough faith to ask for what I really wanted. I believe that was the Holy Spirit speaking to me.

So I said, "Rabbi, let me see again."

He said, "Go, your faith has made you well." And just like that I could see again.

I thanked him from the bottom of my heart. And from that day on, I was a follower of Jesus.

No, I did not become one of his 12 disciples. And I didn't literally follow him around the country. But I listened to him. I believed in him. I followed his teachings.

With the help of some of his other followers I was able to learn a trade. I learned how to work with leather, how to properly cure camel hide, but you can't guess where I got that idea. I found that I was surprisingly good at creating useful things from leather and I was able to more than support myself.

Part of what I learned from Jesus that day was to see the worth of each individual. I may have been invisible to others that day beside the road. But Jesus saw me. More than that he stopped to help me.

Jesus did more than open my physical eyes. He also opened my spiritual eyes. He opened the eyes of my heart. He brought me into the presence of God in a way that I didn't know was even possible. And he helped me to see people as God sees people.

Sometimes the workers in my leather shop complained that I could make a lot more money if I didn't spend so much time talking to beggars and outcasts. No doubt they are right as far as that goes. But that is not what is important to me. I believe that Jesus gave me a special ministry to notice the people that others ignore. Sometimes I give food or money, a couple former beggars are employees in my leather shop.

I can't lift everyone out of poverty. I know that. But I can give everyone I meet the gift of being seen. I can look people in the eye and let them know that I see them, God sees them, and they are worthy of being loved.

May God open the eyes of your heart as well.

Amen.

