

I came across an intriguing question in one of my readings this week; a question that I think applies to each one of us. First let's look at the background story found at the conclusion of the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, and then we will discuss the question. I will be reading from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, verses 46 through 52.

Read Mark 10:46-52

This story in which Jesus restores the sight of a blind man is recorded in three of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. It appears that Mark's account is from an eyewitness because it provides the most detailed discussion. Jericho was an ancient city located five miles west of the Jordan River and about fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem. The main road to Jerusalem ran right through it, like I-25 goes right through downtown Albuquerque. The celebration of the Passover was coming, and the Law required every Jewish male over twelve years old who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem to attend; so, there was a lot of traffic on the road that day; much like during Balloon Festival this month or a holiday weekend. Jesus was among this crowd as He traveled to Jerusalem and His ultimate destiny with the cross.

At the northern gate sat a beggar, Bartimaeus by name. Let's refer to him as Bart for the rest of the morning. Bart had lost his eye sight. In addition, his situation may have been even worse; some scholars think that his name indicates that he was the blind son of a blind father. Because of his handicap, he was not able to work, so he had to resort to begging in order to survive. The presence of a blind beggar just outside the city gates on a road pilgrims took to Jerusalem was a common sight in those days, much like we see on the street corners around here.

As he sat by the north gate, Bart heard footsteps of a large crowd approaching and asked what was happening, and who was passing by. He was told that it was Jesus of Nazareth. As soon as he heard that it was Jesus, he started to cry out; which he would not have done if he had not heard of Jesus before, and if he did not believe that Jesus was able and willing to restore his sight. He didn't hesitate to call out to Jesus. He was not afraid to call attention to himself or to ask for help when he needed it. He distinctly recognized who our Lord was, and the power and authority that had been given to Jesus; so he put all his faith in that power to heal him.

In order to get Jesus' attention and to be heard over the noise of the crowd, Bart started shouting: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Now to those who were walking along with Jesus and were trying to listen to His teachings, this was very annoying. They tried to silence him, but no one was going to deprive him of this opportunity to escape the world of darkness that he was trapped in; this might be the only chance he had; this might be the only time Jesus would ever pass this way. No rebuke, no crowd, nothing was going to stop him from reaching

out to the only one who could help him. So Bart cried with such an uproar that the procession stopped.

His persistent pleas for mercy did not go unanswered. Suddenly, the voice of Jesus was heard saying: "Call him." His persistence had paid off. Then came the invitation: "Cheer up! On your feet! The Master is calling you." And what was Bart's reaction? Our passage tells us that he immediately threw his cloak aside, jumped up, and ran to Jesus. He cast aside anything that might slow him down or might in any way hinder him from approaching Jesus. Remember what we studied last month in the Book of Hebrews in the first verse of the twelfth chapter: "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." This described Bart's reaction to Jesus' call; nothing was going to hinder him from answering Jesus' call.

Those who would come to Jesus must cast aside their own self-sufficiency. Many a person hears the call of Jesus, but unfortunately says in effect: "Wait until I have done this," or "Wait until I have finished this." But Bart came like a shot out of cannon when he heard Jesus' call. He instinctively knew that chances like this may only come once in life time. Sometimes we have a deep longing to abandon some habit, to right a wrong, to give ourselves completely to Christ, but so often we do not act on the moment; and the chance is gone, perhaps never to come again.

Everything happened so quickly; before he realized it, Bart was standing before the Master. And how does Jesus treat this persistent beggar? Does He join the crowd and insist that he hold his peace? Remember that Jesus is on His way to the cross; it is Passover and the triumphant entry, the Lord's Supper, betrayal, crucifixion and the resurrection lie directly ahead of Him. However, with all these things on His mind, Jesus stops to help a beggar along the roadside of life. This should be great news for all of us as we travel this road of life. Jesus is always willing to stop and help us.

The fact that Bart is a blind beggar adds to the significance of the story. Beggars were considered "unclean" and at the bottom of the social ladder. By stopping, Jesus showed that no one is insignificant, that He gives priority to anyone who will call on Him. Jesus is a friend who is willing to listen at any time we call and is ready to help us at once as He was for Bart at this gate in Jericho. We can all take assurance in the fact that Jesus still hears and answers the cries of those in need of His love, mercy and grace.

At some time, each of us calls out to Jesus, longing for healing. However, like Bart, the worldly voices around us tell us to be quiet, that He is too busy to bother with us; that our troubles are not important; or even worse, that we are not important enough to deserve His love and

attention. Yet Jesus stands still and invites each of us to come into His presence today as He did the beggar at the gate. Remember no request is too small, insignificant or too big for the Lord.

Jesus asked Bart: "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus' question encourages Bart to take a deep look at his life; to evaluate where he is; and where he would like to be. Jesus asked Bart what was the one thing that he wanted more than anything else in the world. Bart does not hesitate; he gives a specific answer; he wants his sight restored. The one difference between Bart and many of us is that he knew what he needed and some of us don't. Too often we only go to the Lord with vague requests.

Think about this - when we go to the doctor, we want them to deal with a specific ailment. We are not vague; we don't say that we just don't feel good. We are more specific; we have a sore throat, a chest pain, or pain in a certain part of our body. And this is the way it should be when we come to God. But this may involve something that we don't want to do, and that's a self-examination. However, if we are specific when we go to the Lord as Bart was, things will happen.

Before Bart finished speaking, his eye sight was restored. And what was his response? He followed Jesus along the road. We don't know how far; it may have only been to the gates outside Jerusalem or maybe all the way to the cross and past the empty tomb. But he followed. He was a person of gratitude. He did not selfishly go on his own way when his need was met. His gratitude was expressed in faithful discipleship, following Jesus on His last trip to Jerusalem. It must have cheered the heart of the Lord to find faith such as this in Jericho as He made His way to the cross. And it was a good thing that Bart sought the Lord that day because the Savior **never passed that way again.**

Now imagine that you are Bart this morning, sitting by the side of the dusty road, blinded by the values, desires and temptations of this world, and Jesus comes along. He stops and asks you: "What do you want me to do for you?" That's the intriguing question I mentioned at the beginning of our discussion this morning; "What do you want the Lord to do for you this morning?" How will you respond; what's your answer; what's the first thing that comes to your mind; what's weighing heavy on your heart right now; what's robbing you of peace and happiness in your life; what's the one thing you want Jesus to do for you? The Lord knows what's on our hearts, but He wants us to acknowledge it; to state it with our own voice.

Whatever your need or your problem, rest assured that the Lord will stop to listen to you. He's listening; He's waiting to hear from you; what will your answer be? Will it be something universal like world peace or feed the hungry? Or will it be something like getting rid of all negative news on television, or that this will be a short sermon? Will it be something selfish like winning the lottery? Will it be something vain like not aging, losing weight or getting hair to

grow back on the top of your head again? Or will it be something serious like healing from cancer or a heart condition?

Since we are here in church, maybe your request would be for a greater knowledge of the Bible or a closer relationship with the Lord. Or will it be to find a place where you can serve the Lord, to find your mission field? Maybe your answer would be that a loved one will come to know and love the Lord as you do? You might ask that the hurt from a broken relationship or the loss of a loved one will go away. Or will it be something deeper and more meaningful like finally accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and asking Him to come into your heart?

Whatever it is, believe me Jesus is listening. In Matthew 7:7-8, Jesus promised: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

If ever a hymn writer used a theme which was indicative of her life, it was the blind Fanny Crosby when she wrote, in 1868, "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior." But God did not pass her by. She turned a tragedy at six weeks of age into a triumph of a lifetime. She overcame a terrible, personal adversity and contributed a life of power and purpose to the world. Fanny Jane Crosby was a baby girl of six weeks, in May, 1820, when she caught a common cold. A country doctor unknowingly prescribed a treatment that left her blind for life.

When she was five sympathetic neighbors and friends pooled their money and sent her to a noted New York surgeon. After a careful examination, the specialist said that there was nothing he could do. Looking at her, he said: "Poor little blind girl!" Fanny always remembered those words and turned that sympathetic remark into a life of purpose and service to the Lord. She once told a friend that her blindness had proved a blessing, because it enabled her to be more alone where the writing of her poetry became easy. And she told another that if she had a choice, she would remain blind, for when she died the first face she would see would be the face of her "blessed Savior."

When you listen to the chorus of this hymn it sounds a lot like Bart's cry: "Pass me not, o gentle Savior, hear my humble cry; while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by." Friends, when you really get down to it, we are all beggars along the roadside of life. Jesus passes by, not once but often in our life; but we never know when it will be the last time. Will we let Him pass on by and stay seated with our cup in our hands waiting for the next handout? Do we stay on the roadside and let the Savior with His grace and love pass on by? Or will we call out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me?"

He's listening; He's always listening! When He stops will you run to Him casting aside all your burdens and sins; all the things that have hindered your personal relationship with Him? When He asks you what you want, what will you say? This morning, Jesus invites you to experience

His love and grace as never before. During the closing hymn, prayerfully consider how you will answer Him. Think about your deepest yearning and then share it with the Lord. He's asking each of us what we want; what can He do for us? Be like Bart, don't hesitate to give it all to the Lord and let Him heal you also of what is weighing on your heart and mind right now. Be like Bart, answer the Lord's invitation and come running to Him. Experience His healing power as never before. Amen