

The One Who Calls

October 24, 2021
2021 BC Synod Convention – Closing Worship Service
by Bishop Greg Mohr

Text for 22nd Sunday after Pentecost:
Mark 10:46-52

The journey begins with One;
one solitary figure:
Jesus.

It is time,
the right time,
the holy time.

Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem
and this final stage of his journey begins.

The 12 are there as well,
accompanying him on this journey.
So, too, is the crowd.
Soon they will be throwing their blankets and cloaks and palm
branches on the ground.

But today,
they are on the way from Jericho,
a throng of people.

There is hustle and bustle;
the activity of journey.
Excitement and fear,
Hope and foreboding.

But then . . . a voice.
A solitary voice.

One, calling out in the wilderness;
the wilderness of time and space,
the wilderness of forgotten-hood,
of living on the shoulder,
on the margins;
being pushed aside,
ignored,
perhaps invisible.

This one,
on a wilderness journey of just trying to survive,
out there on the margins,
on the side of the road.

Do you know what crowds do when they're on the road and you are in the way?
They push you aside,
ignore you,
trample over you.

But there is that voice —
calling out in the wilderness,
calling to be seen,
to be known:

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”
“Turn your ear to me.

“SEE me.
See me as someone.
Be in relationship with me.
Be with me in my brokenness.”

“As you, O Son of David, as you turn your face toward Jerusalem,
turn now — NOW — turn your face toward me.”

Such voices, such individuals, are usually nameless.
But here, we have a name:
Bartimaeus.

The nameless one is named.
The one on the margins is no longer invisible.

Undeterred, though, the crowd surges on.
“Shut up.
Get back.
Go back to being invisible to us.
Go back to being nameless.”

When Bartimaeus uses his voice to call out,
the crowd reacts.

They prefer him to be quiet,
compliant,
on the edge of nowhere.

But he calls;
he calls out ever more loudly and they react.
“Shut up. Go away.”

This causes me to wonder:
whose voices do we try to silence —
overtly or systemically,
slyly,
ignorantly,
prejudicially?

Who do we silence?
For often it is my voice, your voice,
our voice that is in the way.

But in the midst of the throng of people,
in the midst of the hustle and bustle of moving on the journey,
there is the One who stops.

There is One who hears,
One who stands still: Jesus.

Speaking to the crowd, to the disciples,
speaking to **me** and to **you**,
Jesus says, "Call him here."

And that very act of stopping and acknowledging,
of hearing and listening,
brings about a change in the crowd.

The shift of what happens to the crowd is fascinating.
They move from a position of standing over against Bartimaeus,
pushing him down,
deriding him,
ostracizing him,

to that of being agents of mercy.

Instead of deriding Bartimaeus
they become messengers,
messengers of grace.

Bartimaeus' actions and Jesus' response TRANSFORM them!
They are forced to **see** Bartimaeus.

Even in his shouting, they are forced to see him.
They can't stand his shouting, but it does mean they have
to hear him, even if they do not like it.

"Call him here," says Jesus.
And the crowd amazingly responds to that Word of Grace.

They call to Bartimaeus: "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

What words of hope!
Words of compassion,

spoken by the one who calls,
the one who is always calling,
the one who shepherds;
the one who seeks the last, the lost and the least.
the one who sees beyond the margins,
sees the person, the humanness.

I think of the many, many voices shouting right now.
Voices hurting, drowning, choking.

We can't breathe.
Storms are bearing down on us.
Rising sea levels are threatening us.
Arsenic and mercury are in our drinking water.
The lungs of our planet are phlegmatic.

All creation groans, groans . . . groans.
Do we HEAR?

We must.
We must hear.
We must stop and hear and LISTEN
We must stop and hear and listen and act.

The one who calls us into relationship so that we may be in
relationship with others, be in relationship with our world,

this one calls us to HEAR, to be, and to respond.

We are the crowd,
journeying from our Jericho.

And there are voices,
a myriad of voices,
calling out to us,
calling from wilderness.

See us.
Hear us.
Be reconciled to us.

Other voices, too, are calling out to us,
calling from the wilderness.

See — see not just us — but see the WORLD!
See this beloved creation.
See how it is starving,
choking,
dying.

The voices call us out,
disturb us,
make us uncomfortable.

But in the calling,
in the uncomfortableness,
we are confronted,
and we are called to be transformed.

This text from the Gospel of Mark could not be any more timely today!

The lungs of our planet are sick and infected.
Its beating heart is struggling.

The life flow of water,
our rives and streams and oceans,
are infected and clogged.

Son of David, have mercy.
We are broken.
But more than that,
we — WE — have broken your earth, your creation.
We have broken covenant.

Call us out.
Call us forth.

Our human hubris turns to “false gold” everything that we touch.
Anthropocentrism shall be no longer,
must be no longer.

We like to be “in the know.”
We like to be in charge.
We like power and privilege.
We like controlling things.

But we're no longer in control.
We have messed up.
We have messed up relationships,
messed up community.

We have messed up our relationship to land, to air,
to creatures and place.

We are the ones who need to be imitators of Bartimaeus and call out —
call out to those who might teach us,
to those who might invite us into a journey, onto a journey,
of learning, of humility, of reconciliation.

We are the ones who need to call out,
to call out to those who might teach us
of land and mystery, of waters and life-giving seas.

We are the ones who need to call out,
to call out to those who might teach us
what it means to be on the margins, put down, trodden upon;
to really know what matters, who matters,
to help us learn what it means to stand over against the powers
and principalities

and to call forth justice.

Over these past eight years we have been stating time and again what might seem obvious:
God is at work in the world.
God is out there, ahead of us.
And God calls us to join what God is doing out there, in our neighbourhoods,
our communities, our world.

A voice, calling,
calling us to wake up, catch up,
to join what God is up to.
A voice, calling us to see God's activity in places we otherwise might not
have thought to look.

A voice,
calling us to SEE life's Bartimaeuses,
to hear their cry,
to participate in God's love and care for the world.

What is important to know is that this is not Greg Mohr's idea.
This is not Greg Mohr's mission.

This is a calling placed upon us by the one who journeys from life's Jerichos.
This is a call to catch up to what God is doing in loving and blessing the world.

Over these past few decades, we as church, have undergone significant and
challenging shifts in terms of our presence and ministry in our society.

The church is no longer in a place of privilege and power and influence.

We need to live into this liminal time,
to sit in it,
learn from it,
discern from it.

Yet in the midst of this dislocation, our ministry continues.
The call to be agents of grace and mercy continues.
The call to care for the world continues.

We are ever mindful of that passage from the book of Micah: "What does the
Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly
with your God?" (Micah 6: 8)

This is our call.
People come and go,
leaders come and go,
bishops come and go.

But our calling remains.
God's call to love and serve the world remains.

This is not about me;
this is not about you.

This is about God's mission,
God's calling,
God's activity in the world.

There, on the side of the road, are life's Bartimaeuses.
Do today's Bartimaeuses have something to teach us?
Can they show us the way?

A young woman from Sweden,
one from Kenya, from South Africa,
one from Indonesia, from India,
one from Vancouver and Iqaluit and Tk'emlúps ...

Ones such as these shall lead us.
Bartimaeus will lead us.

They will teach us
because they KNOW!

May our eyes be wide open.
May our ears hear.
May our hearts turn.

The one
who journeys from Jericho
calls out to us ...