

I come in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I can see it now! The marquee flashes the riveting title: A day in the life of Bartimaeus. The plot is thick, so thick that it seems too simple. It stars Bartimaeus himself, a man who at one time had vision, but became blind. The story takes place at the side of a road that goes from Jericho to Jerusalem, a 15-mile trek similar to hiking from here to Brownsville. This particular road is rugged, dusty, and hot. Bartimaeus makes his way to the side of the road, stops, sits down, and positions his cloak around him to catch coins tossed by passers-by. He is no different than any other social outcast, blending into the backdrop of a desert wasteland. As pilgrims walk by, Bartimaeus begs for money, “alms for the poor”, hoping they will toss a coin or two in his direction. For Jews, it was considered an honorable gesture to give alms to the poor. At sunset, Bartimaeus picks up the coins from his cloak, and finds a place to sleep. And so it goes. Until . . .

On this particular day in our gospel story, the life of Bartimaeus is a little brighter. Travelers heading to Jerusalem anticipating the great Passover celebration. The road had more traffic than usual, and the pilgrims are probably feeling a little more generous than other times of the year. It’s sort of like the time between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when our wallets loosen up. Charitable donations flow more freely. For Bartimaeus, it was “Black Friday.”

As this scene in our story fades, Bartimaeus is seen, reaping the benefits of the generosity extended by the Passover attendees. He was content. Until

Like anyone pushed out into the streets, Bartimaeus would have been street-smart. He likely knew how to work the system in order to survive. So, I imagine that the “word on the street” was that there was this messiah-like itinerate preacher coming through, and that he could do extraordinary things – magical - and miraculous. The stories Bartimaeus may have been told suggested that the long-awaited messiah would come from royal lineage, which, for Jews would be from the line of King David. Could Jesus be him?

Our Gospel story tells us that Bartimaeus hears the voice of Jesus among the crowd, navigating the rugged path towards Jerusalem. Jesus, like other faithful Jews, is also on his way to Jerusalem for the festivities. The evangelists give us the sense that Jesus was well aware of the danger awaiting him in Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus shouts out, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” People around him tell him to shut up. Shush! Shhhhh! “Don’t make a spectacle of yourself! You are not worthy!” So, what does Bartimaeus do? He yells louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” He doesn’t care what other people think. What has he got to lose? He’s desperate! He’s inspired!

But why would he ask Jesus for mercy? Pleading for mercy usually involves some offense with a request for forgiveness. It doesn't make sense . . . Until Until we realize that blindness and other ailments were considered punishment by God for evil committed by the afflicted person, or family member, and it was deserved.

Let's pause for a moment. Are feelings of alienation, loneliness, and rejection foreign to you? Have you ever felt that you were not worthy to be part of society? Have you ever lived at the edge of the road, left to watch the world go by, leaving you out? Have you ever felt that your misfortune was God punishing you? Have you ever just closed your eyes in defeat, and spread out your cloak in order to capture a few tidbits of dignity from some anonymous donor?

So, here sits Bartimaeus, wrapped in his cloak, spread out to collect coins (and probably doing reasonably well). Jesus walks by, and Bartimaeus shouts out to him in order to get his attention.

Jesus catches his plea, and summons Bartimaeus to come to him. Bartimaeus jumps up and casts off his cloak. He casts off his cloak, scattering all of the coins he collected, and left them where he was sitting. He left all he had behind, and never looked back.

Jesus brings him front and center, exposed, and without any possessions. Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants him to do for him. Imagine if Jesus asked you what you would like him to do for you. What would you ask for? Our main character, Bartimaeus asks Jesus to allow him to ‘see **again.**’ He had vision in the past, but lost it. Have you ever lost sight; lost your way?

Bartimaeus asks to see (**not to be seen**), but to be blessed with renewed vision – unlike James and John from last week’s readings, who wanted places of honor and status, **to be seen** and to be envied. Bartimaeus sought acceptance by the community, and to love him for who God made him to be, whereas, James and John, Jesus’ closest friends, sought fame and status, trying to take advantage of who they associated with.

Bartimaeus left all he had behind, unlike the faithful pharisee who could not bring himself to sell his possessions in order to gain the Kingdom of Heaven. The faithful pharisee knew and kept the all of the Laws, could recite doctrine and the Shema, but was held captive by his possessions. Bartimaeus abandoned his “Black Friday” windfall in order to meet Jesus. Can you turn away from your worldly possessions for the sake of Jesus? What would you have done if you were Bartimaeus?

Here is a blind, marginalized beggar, who did not know the 613 Laws of Judaism, who could not recite Torah, who may have never entered the Temple or a synagogue, didn't know the prayers, and did not keep Kosher, but was willing to abandon all he has, and through faith, recognize Jesus as the one who can save him from his blindness. Bartimaeus gambled all he had in order to gain vision.

Jesus recognizes his faith and does, indeed, restore Bartimaeus' sight, and more importantly, gives him vision. And so, Bartimaeus leaves all he has at the side of the road, enters the pathway, and walks with Jesus. Sort of a happy ending. Kinda gives me a mental image of the hero mounting his horse, tipping his hat, and riding off into the sunset.

Until . . . Until we realize that Bartimaeus is following alongside of Jesus into Jerusalem, where Jesus would be persecuted and executed. We don't know what happened to Bartimaeus. Our storyline gets fuzzy. Did Bartimaeus live happily ever after? Did his renewed vision give him the confidence to continue to walk the path towards the Kingdom of Heaven? Did his faith hold out, amidst possible persecution, imprisonment, or execution? We just don't know.

But you know yourself! To whom do you best relate in this story? Are you Bartimaeus, or a pilgrim on the road, thoughtlessly tossing coins to the beggars, seeking admiration and honor? Are you among those who silence the cries for

help in order to maintain a sense of social order? Do you push those who you consider to be less desirable, away, preventing them from walking along side of you on the path towards Jerusalem? These are hard questions to answer.

Sometimes we don't like our answers when we own up to them. We squirm a little.

The good news is that you can count on Jesus as your intercessor, as written in our reading from Hebrews. Jesus is beside you, ready to forgive you and inspire you. Jesus is on the path with you, and calls **you** to come to Him, front and center, in order to give you the fulness of his being. He is there to restore your sight, and give you renewed vision and hope. Your job? Call out, "Jesus, have mercy on me?" If others try to silence you, call out all the louder. "Jesus, have mercy on me?" Let Him hear your voice so that you can hear His.

This is not the end of the story. It is only the intermission. And you can rename this production, and call it YOUR story! The plot includes you, and you can have your sight restored. You can disrupt the show for the sake of the Gospel. You can accept Jesus' healing mercy! You can move from the side of the road onto the path, and mount your horse. You can tip your hat, turn towards the light, and ride off into the sunset – with a renewed vision. Until Amen.