

24 October 2021: Mark 10:46-52 (Proper 25)

There came a disruptive voice: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!* The speaker is the blind beggar Bartimaeus, sitting by the roadside, the site of his daily struggle against starvation. As the poor, homeless and destitute of every age he was likely considered a nuisance or not seen at all. The poor, the handicapped, the down-on-their luck, the disposable are often embarrassments to those with 'normal' lives.

Of course, the crowd told him to shut up. It must have been soul-wrenching for Jesus, engulfed by people unable to see suffering, incapable of responding with mercy. Bartimaeus did not rely on charity for the word charity comes from the same root as 'cherish.' Charity is response to someone loved who is suffering. Bartimaeus is not cherished by his neighbors; he has his 'place'—in the dust—and he has his 'role' – begging for loose change. They are blessed, he is not, and all is right in their little world.

They tell him to shut up; he will not be silenced nor 'kept in his place.' Here is when the extraordinary happens: Jesus hears Bartimaeus and, Mark writes, Jesus *stood still* (49a). Imagine the crowd, half following, half driving Jesus along. At once it comes to a dead stop. Just as in his parable when the shepherd leaves 99 to search for one lost sheep (Luke 15:1ff), here Jesus stops the hustling multitude for the sake of one poor, blind man. Jesus identifies so much with the poor and suffering that in Matthew's Gospel he not only commands his followers to see and minister to them, but says what we do for them, we do to him. Jesus tells us we will be judged on how we treat the poor, the sick, the hungry and naked, the helpless, and imprisoned. For Christians, charity is not niceness; charity is the outward, visible sign of faith in Jesus.

Jesus asks the same question of Bartimaeus he asked James and John in last week's Gospel (Mark 10:35-45) but, the context is radically different. Jesus asks: *What is it you want me to do for you* (36a)? James and John ask to sit at Jesus' right and left in glory (37). James and John are fixated on authority and status for themselves. Bartimaeus wants to be healed, be made whole. The conclusion is unavoidable: the foundation of our life in Christ is the desire to be made whole, to be healed of blindness and vanity.

Jesus heals Bartimaeus. Something extraordinary happens as a result. Mark tells us Bartimaeus followed Jesus *on the way* (52b). This is a detail of immense importance. Mark's narrative continues with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, as we observe on Palm Sunday. Bartimaeus, now able to see, sees it all. He will be a witness to all that Jesus accomplishes during Holy Week. He will truly see Jesus, who he is and what he does. Therefore, this gift of sight that Jesus gives is not merely physical seeing but spiritual and supernatural comprehension. We are all to be Bartimaeus, healed from blindness and vanity so that we may follow Jesus and see him clearly.

The last take-away from today's Gospel is this: if you truly want wisdom, discernment, spiritual maturity, and the other gifts of the Spirit: Ask. Ask Jesus to heal you of all blindness, all self-serving vanities. Keep on asking him for eyes to see, an open mind to comprehend, willingness and strength to respond in charity. Let nothing and no one dissuade you. Do not allow your own ignorance or disability or anyone intimidate you. Keep on crying out in the face of all obstacles: Jesus, have mercy on me.

If you want a worthy example of what servant ministry looks like, you need look no further than our dear sister in Christ, Deacon Dianne Hall, whose life and ministry we celebrate today. Through the years she has touched so many lives in so many ways with so little fanfare and no self-seeking vanity. Deacon Dianne has been a stable, committed, caring, compassionate minister of the Gospel during some of the most challenging years at Calvary. She has done so with graceful determination, quiet confidence, and a huge heart for God's people, for the sick and suffering, for the lonely and isolated, for the poor and needy. She is an example of what a true follower of Jesus does, thinks and speaks. We are blessed as a faith community and as her friends. We cannot say fervently enough: For the life and ministry of Deacon Dianne Hall at Calvary Church, in our Diocese, in our city and county, and beyond: Thanks be to God!

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.