
JESUS WELCOMES BEGGARS
Sermon for the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost, 2021
Mark 10:46-52

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Mark 10:46-52: ⁴⁶ **Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and His disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.** ⁴⁷ **When he heard that it was Jesus from Nazareth, he began to shout, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!”**

⁴⁸ **Many people kept urging him to be quiet. Instead, he shouted much louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

⁴⁹ **Jesus stopped and said, “Call him!”**

Then they called the blind man and told him, “Cheer up! Get up! He is calling you.”

⁵⁰ **He threw aside his outer garment, jumped up and went to Jesus.** ⁵¹ **Jesus asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?”**

The blind man told Him, “Rabboni, I want to see again.”

⁵² **Jesus told him, “Go! Your faith has saved you.”**

Immediately he could see again and began to follow Jesus on the road.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

It is said that at the end of his life, some friends of Martin Luther found a scrap of paper in his coat pocket. On it was written the words, *“This is true. We are all beggars.”* What had this man - whom God had chosen as his special instrument to reform the Church; this German monk - through whom God had brought the mighty church of Rome to its knees; this pastor - to whom God had granted extraordinary gifts to translate, interpret, communicate and rightly divide the Word of truth - what had he concluded after a lifetime full of accomplishment? Nothing more than that he, and everyone else, are beggars before a holy and gracious God, who can do nothing but cry to Jesus, who must do nothing but receive His gifts, and who joyfully follow Him.

Today, Mark records that Jesus was passing through Jericho on His march toward Jerusalem, where He would be crucified for the sins of the world. **“As Jesus and His disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.”** Blindness is a horrible affliction in any age, but it was especially so in 1st century Israel. They did not use guide dogs or braille and had no specialised schools or homes or services, and because no one would hire them for work, they were left to beg for their daily bread. To add further insult to injury, the blind also lived under the social stigma that their blindness was God’s punishment for some sin that either they or their ancestors had committed.¹

These were the conditions under which Bartimaeus lived. He may have been blind, but he was under no illusion: he knew he was utterly dependent on the mercy of others for his very existence.

But as blind as Bartimaeus was, there was one thing that, by God’s grace, he could see more clearly than many others. Even as he was unable to work or to get to the temple by himself to present any sacrifices, nevertheless, his ears worked just fine, and he used them. And what he had heard was people talking about a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who had travelled throughout Israel preaching a message of God’s grace and mercy and forgiveness for sinners and performing miracles of healing that had never been seen before. But while many people saw nothing more than a man, the Son of Joseph and Mary, Bartimaeus saw the promised Messiah, the Son God had promised to King David a thousand years earlier, who would establish God’s kingdom on earth and rescue His people from the misery of sin.² Because Bartimaeus believed that this was the one Man in the universe who could help him, **“he began to shout, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!”**

¹ John 9:1-2

² 2 Samuel 7:11-16

We can learn a lot from blind Bartimaeus. First, while our world is convinced that seeing is believing, Bartimaeus turns this on its head: believing is seeing! Just think: at least some of those in that crowd in Jericho would have seen Jesus' miracles with their own eyes: and we know for sure that many of the Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus did, but they still did not believe that He was the Son of God, the promised Saviour. Faith does not come from seeing but from hearing the message.³ It is still like that today. When we have the confession of sins and are absolved, we know and believe that we have been cleansed of all sin by Jesus' precious blood not by what we see, but because we *hear* and *trust* the promise given by Jesus, namely, "*If you forgive any people's sins, they have been forgiven; if you retain any people's sins, they have been retained*" (John 20:23). In Baptism, to our eyes, nothing more dramatic happens than someone gets wet. Yet Peter declares that the impossible happens in that washing when he says, "*baptism now saves you*" (1 Peter 3:21). The bread and wine we receive look like normal bread and wine, but don't believe your eyes; instead, believe Jesus' words when He says, "*this is My body... this is My blood... which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 26:26, 28). Many are waiting and demanding to see proof before they believe in Jesus. They will be waiting all the way until Judgment Day when sadly for them, the only thing they will see is Jesus' wrath at their unbelief. Let us learn from Bartimaeus: hearing is believing, and believing is seeing.

Second, whether we care to admit it or not, we are all like Bartimaeus. We are all beggars before God. Scripture is crystal clear in teaching that we are all completely helpless to save ourselves.⁴ We are conceived and born without true fear or faith in God; dead in sin, blind to the Gospel, and enemies of God. Left to ourselves, we cannot even obey the least of God's commands, much less obey all of them to the perfect standard God demands. We are miserable beggars before God who can do nothing but cry for mercy, which is why it's no coincidence that one of the first things we do each week in divine worship is to sing "*Lord have mercy.*" These words not only remind us that we are beggars; they remind us of who is serving who in the "worship service" - we don't come here to serve, *but to be served by Jesus!*

Bartimaeus believed he needed Jesus to serve him, and so he ignored the crowd's urging to be quiet. "**Instead, he shouted much louder, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

Jesus stopped and said, "Call him!"

Then they called the blind man and told him, "Cheer up! Get up! He is calling you."

You would think Jesus would have better things to do, people to see, and preparations to make as He walked the lonely road to the cross than to be bothered with a miserable, blind beggar. Maybe sometimes, in our times of suffering and times of weakness, we think that Jesus has better things to do than concern Himself with us and our problems. Maybe we believe that we shouldn't bother Him because He is too busy taking care of the significant, big, important issues and people in the world. Such thinking is wrong. There is no problem too big and no believer too small for Jesus because "*the Son of Man has come to search for and to save what has been lost*" (Luke 19:10). Jesus has come to hear and help beggars, beggars like Bartimaeus, and beggars like you and me.

Bartimaeus didn't waste any time. Hearing that Jesus was calling for him, "**He threw aside his outer garment, jumped up and went to Jesus.**" That outer garment was quite possibly Bartimaeus' only earthly possession. It was the roof over his head and the mattress under his back. And yet, at Jesus' invitation, he threw it all aside to go to Jesus, whom he believed could give him everything he needed and more. He would let nothing keep him from Jesus. We, too, must not let anything hinder us from coming to Jesus. We, too, have a standing invitation from Jesus: "*Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden, and I shall give you rest!*" (Matthew 11:30). Jesus has carried all our sins and sorrows to the cross. His presence and forgiveness lighten every load.

So why is it that maybe we don't take up Jesus with His offer as often as we ought? Is pride getting in the way? "*I can handle this myself.*" Is it embarrassment? "*I shouldn't have to beg for help.*" Do we have an unhealthy trust in worldly distractions or remedies that keep us from Jesus? Is it doubt or unbelief? "*Jesus couldn't possibly help me in this situation.*" Or maybe, is it guilt or shame? "*Jesus knows what I've said, done, and thought, why in the world would He help a miserable sinner like me?*" Whatever it is, we need to remember that coming to Jesus for help is not about us, our worthiness or unworthiness; it's all about Him with His mercy, His power, His promises, and His love. Remember: we are all beggars with nothing to offer and everything to ask - and Jesus welcomes beggars.

Here's the proof: "**Jesus asked him, "What do you want Me to do for you?"**

³ Romans 10:17

⁴ Romans 3:28; Galatians 3:10

The blind man told Him, “Rabboni, I want to see again.”

Think about the guts it took to make that request. Bartimaeus wasn't asking for a ride, for beer money or for food. No, instead, he was asking for an impossible miracle, and yet, he was convinced that this was God's Son standing before him - the Son of David God had promised who would come specifically “to open eyes that are blind, to bring captives out of the dungeon and to bring those who live in darkness from the prison house” (Isaiah 42:7). Jesus' answered Bartimaeus' bold and impossible request. **“Go! Your faith has saved you.”** Jesus gave Bartimaeus an impossible gift: his sight.

Why? Now understand, Jesus is not saying - like so-called “faith-healers” today - that Bartimaeus' great faith was what caused his healing. If that were true, why didn't Bartimaeus simply “believe” himself healed sooner? Why did he wait for Jesus to walk down the road? No, Bartimaeus' faith healed/saved him because it had led him to the only One who could heal him. Bartimaeus' faith was nothing more (and nothing less) than a beggar's open hand that would receive the gift Jesus would graciously give. Bartimaeus' faith only saved him because, to put it bluntly: he begged the right person. Saving, healing, justifying faith doesn't “do” anything; saving faith simply receives what Jesus freely gives.

Bartimaeus' faith didn't stop there. He **“began to follow Jesus on the road.”** It's just days before Holy Week. Jesus' road is still leading to Jerusalem, to the hornet's nest of Jesus' enemies who wanted Him dead. If Bartimaeus knew this, it certainly didn't stop him from following Jesus. Jesus' road led directly to the cross. It led to suffering and pain and persecution, not only for Jesus but for all who were bold enough to follow Him and confess His name. But Bartimaeus followed Jesus because even though he would no longer have to beg for his daily bread, he still needed Jesus to suffer and die for his sins; he was still a spiritual beggar. He still needed what only Jesus could give him.

Sadly, that's a lesson that so many people forget. Many people of every age behave like nine of the ten lepers in Luke 17 who, once they get what they want from Jesus, walk away from Him and go their own way. Let us never forget that after we have come to Jesus in our time of need, after He has answered our cry for mercy, after He has assured us that our sins are forgiven and heaven is ours, that we are still, and will always be beggars. We never graduate beyond begging Jesus to provide everything from clothing and food to forgiveness and salvation. From the day we were brought to the font to the day we breathe our last, we remain beggars who must rely entirely on Jesus' mercy. The good news is that Jesus' invitation to receive His gifts still stands! Even though we won't see Him walking by on the street, He does promise to meet us right here, where His Word is proclaimed and His Sacrament is distributed. This is why we come to church: this is where beggars like us come to receive the gifts Jesus freely gives, and receiving those gifts gratefully and faithfully is how we joyfully follow Jesus.

Luther was right. “We are all beggars.” Beggars who can do nothing but cry for mercy. Beggars who must do nothing but receive what He wants to give; and beggars who joyfully wish to follow Jesus to eternal life. Thank God that Jesus has time and mercy in abundance for beggars like us! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty and everlasting God and Father, You have made your promises to us and to our children. Therefore look with mercy on this place of worship, and open Your ears to our prayers as we have gathered here to hear Your Word and to praise Your name.

Fill our minds with the light of Your Holy Spirit that we may hear, read, and receive Your Word with true reverence, faith, and gratitude. Teach us of Your creative power, wise care, and continual mercy. Move us to praise You not only for those things but especially for the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, who came to serve us, and give His life as a ransom for us. May we believe Your Word with all our hearts, and let it rule our lives.

Give us the spiritual gift to see ourselves as You see us. Grant that our whole lives may be in penitence for our sinfulness and faith in Jesus' redemption. Fit us out with Your armour and weapons that we may be strong in Your mighty power, equipped to resist the attacks of Satan, the temptations of the world, and the weakness of our own flesh. Rescue us from the slavery of sin in our lives, and keep us safe for the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Give us opportunities to serve others in sincere love, empowered and motivated by Jesus' humble service to us.

Help us to know and use the power of prayer, so that in faith we may seek Your blessings for all our needs, place before You the needs of our loved ones and all other people, and trust in Your goodness, no matter how You direct our lives.

Protect us from the dangers of storm and fire, disease and famine, division and war, treachery and rebellion, luxury and ease, ignorance and superstition, lingering illness and painful death, and from an evil end. We know only too well that we have broken Your commandments, and that we deserve Your anger and judgment, but treat us always according to Your mercy, O Lord. Give us power to submit humbly to Your wise and holy will.

Bless Your Church, and keep it strong in the truth of Christ Jesus. Inspire Your people to worship You with pure hearts. Give pastors to Your Church who honour their calling with a godly life, seek the lost with a Christlike love, and preach the whole saving plan of God with boldness.

Wield the sword of the Spirit among all nations, that wickedness may be put down, and righteousness may flourish. Give to all rulers unselfish zeal and wise goals, that they may work for the peace of the world and for the well-being of all mankind. Bless our own land, we pray. Give our Queen and all who make and administer our laws wisdom and high principles, that they may carry out their tasks in a way pleasing to You. Bless all honest work in agriculture and industry, so that our needs may be supplied, the less privileged provided for, and all moved to live in constant remembrance of Your goodness and care.

All these things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Your only Son, our Saviour, to whom, with You and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and praise for ever and ever. Amen.

22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 31:7-9

⁷ For this is what the LORD has said: “Sing a joyous song for Jacob and rejoice for the foremost of the nations! Proclaim, give praise and say, ‘LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel!’” ⁸ Look! I shall bring them from the North-Country and gather them from the remotest parts of the earth. Blind people and lame people will be among them, together with pregnant women and the women in labour. A great company will return here. ⁹ They will be weeping as they come and, as they make pleas for mercy, I shall bring them back. I shall lead them beside rivers of water, on a level path, on which they will not stumble. For I shall be the Father of Israel and Ephraim will be My first-born son.”

Hebrews 7:23-28

²³ Many were made priests because death prevented them from continuing. ²⁴ However, because Jesus continues **for ever**, the **Priesthood** that He has is permanent. ²⁵ Therefore, He can save completely those who come to God through Him, because He is always alive to intercede for them. ²⁶ For such a High Priest is what we needed, who is holy, blameless, spotless, separated from sinners and has been made higher than the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need to offer sacrifices every day, like those High Priests, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people. For He did this once for

all when He offered Himself. ²⁸ For the Law appoints as High Priests men who are weak; but the Word of the oath, which came after the Law, has appointed the **Son**, who has been made perfect **for ever**.

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and His disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus from Nazareth, he began to shout, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many people kept urging him to be quiet. Instead, he shouted much louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him!”

Then they called the blind man and told him, “Cheer up! Get up! He is calling you.”

⁵⁰ He threw aside his outer garment, jumped up and went to Jesus. ⁵¹ Jesus asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

The blind man told Him, “Rabboni, I want to see again.”

⁵² Jesus told him, “Go! Your faith has saved you.”

Immediately he could see again and began to follow Jesus on the road.