

Every time I hear the story about Bartimaeus meeting Jesus, I hear something new. This week I noticed the word “again” in a new way. Jesus asked a blind beggar named Bartimaeus what he wanted Jesus to do for him. The man’s response was, “That I might see **again**.”

I have been asking myself all week what difference this word makes, what the difference is between Jesus healing a man who has always been blind, versus Jesus

healing a man who once could see but had lost his sight. The answer I have come to is that in a physical way, there is no difference. Blind is blind, and Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus. But this is much more than a simple healing story. Jesus did heal Bartimaeus of his physical blindness, but Bartimaeus was also healed through and through, healed of his spiritual blindness.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. When we first “meet” Bartimaeus he is sitting by the road leading out of Jericho up to Jerusalem, begging money from the crowd of people passing by on their way to Passover. As it turns out, Bartimaeus was the gold medal winner of blind begging, the valedictorian of blind beggars. I mean, Bartimaeus did EVERYTHING right:

- Unlike Jesus’ disciples, Bartimaeus knew EXACTLY who Jesus is. Bartimaeus called Jesus “Son of David,” a Messianic title not heard before in Mark’s gospel and only heard later when Jesus triumphally entered Jerusalem. “How,” I wonder, “did Bartimaeus know who Jesus is, when Jesus’ own disciples had trouble figuring out who Jesus is?” Even we, today, can get Jesus’ identity wrong: not only a great teacher, but the Messiah: “Jesus, Son of David.”
- Not only did Bartimaeus know EXACTLY who Jesus is, he refused to be silenced by Jesus’ entourage. When “many” in the crowd around Jesus told Bartimaeus to “shut up,” he persisted and shouted all the louder, “Jesus, Son of David, have MERCY on me.” Bartimaeus persisted so well that Jesus didn’t call Bartimaeus to him, Jesus made his followers do it. “Call him here,” Jesus told them. Can you perceive the rebuke? No longer does Jesus say, “don’t



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prevent people from coming to me,” but “YOU call them to me.”

The last time Jesus had instructed his disciples to do something, he had told them to feed 5,000 hungry people who had no food, and they had looked at him blankly. Now “**they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take courage; get up, HE is calling you.’**”

...Whoa. Jesus didn’t have to show his disciples how to call the man. Not only did they relay Jesus’ immediate message, but they also added a word they had learned from Jesus when they had been cowering in a boat during a storm. “Take courage!” Our translation renders this, “Take heart,” as if this were a pre-modern version of “Have a good day.” NO! This is “take courage,” or “have faith,” take the kind of sustenance that only God can provide: “rely on God;” ACT while relying on God.

- Not only was Bartimaeus extremely persistent in his faith in Christ Jesus, Bartimaeus did something the rich man didn’t do in our gospel lesson two weeks ago. THIS DAY, Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, very likely his only possession, one that contained all the coins his begging had netted him that day. Bartimaeus left EVERYTHING to come to Jesus, everything that would have been quickly scooped up by someone in the crowd.
- But leaving everything behind to come to Jesus was not all our superstar blind beggar did exactly right. Jesus asked Bartimaeus the same question he had asked the Zebedee brothers last week, “What do you want me to do for you? Bartimaeus’ answer wasn’t “give me glory.” Instead, he answered, “let me see again.” Well, that’s ONE way to translate Bartimaeus’ answer. The way I prefer, equally valid, is, “let me look up again.”

Jesus was forever “looking up.” He looked up when he prayed. He looked up before he healed people. He even had looked up before showing his disciples how to feed five-thousand hungry people with no money and little food. So, Bartimaeus’ answer to Jesus revealed that he wanted something more than just his eyesight—he wanted a deeper healing, a renewed relationship with God; “Let me ‘look up’ again,” he begged.

So, that’s how Bartimaeus is a superstar among blind beggars. And that’s how I learned from Bartimaeus how to get up from MY place of pity beside the road of life and come to Jesus anew. Because, you see, I’ve BEEN THERE, not physically blind, not actually begging for money, but blind and begging none-the-less.

- I was by that roadside begging after I got divorced, a status my upbringing had taught was an unredeemable ticket to hell.
- I was by that roadside begging when I was unemployed and I discovered that the Navy intelligence job that I loved and left had been my whole identity.
- I was by that roadside begging every single time someone in Jesus’ entourage that we call “the church” told me to “be quiet” when I tried to come to Jesus.

I’m guessing that each of you have also been where Bartimaeus was sitting in today’s lesson: beside the road of life, knowing that you were blind and unable to “look up” and claim God’s blessing in life. If so, I trust that, like Bartimaeus, you were able to persist in your faith and come to Jesus—as many times as required.

When I ran to Jesus, as Bartimaeus did, I got healing and more, not always right away but with faith and prayer layers of healing, including a new relationship that persists to this day, some 37 years later, and a new vocation, one that I had never dreamed of for myself. As for the church, aren’t we ALL still learning how to call people to Jesus, still learning that the church isn’t for us who are in it, so much as for those who are not yet here?

Bartimaeus became Jesus’ disciple the day Jesus healed him. We know this because our lesson says, “Bartimaeus followed Jesus ‘on the way.’” This term, “the way,” was a metaphor for “discipleship” in the early Christian Church. Plus, think about this: Bartimaeus was healed just 18 miles from Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem that very week that we call Holy Week. Bartimaeus must have been an eyewitness to those existence-changing events as he followed Jesus “on the way.”

My question for you today is where have YOU followed Jesus since Jesus healed you, since Jesus made you one of his disciples? Some of you have followed Jesus a long way since he healed you. But if you are still, or yet again, sitting by the roadside begging today, don’t despair. Do as Bartimaeus did: “Take courage. Get up. Jesus is calling you.” Gather your faith and come to Jesus, who is waiting to heal you—again!