

**“Blind Bystanders”**  
**Mark 10:46-52 Part 2**  
**May 4, 2025**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**  
*Pastor Nicoletti*

**The Reading of the Word**

We return this morning to the Gospel of Mark, and to the very same passage we looked at last Sunday: the healing of blind Bartimaeus.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. Along the way he continues his ministry to his disciples and to those in need.

And as they walk on the way ... Bartimaeus cries out for help.

And as we said last week, there are at least two perspectives to enter into this text from. [Wright, 144-145]

One is the perspective of Bartimaeus, and how he experienced these events. And we considered that last week.

But another is the perspective of the crowd. And I want to take some time to consider that perspective this morning.

Because we often find ourselves in the crowd following Jesus ... and I think Mark is actually confronting us here with some tough lessons for the crowd – including for some of Jesus’s closest followers.

Moreover, I think that Mark is showing us that while Bartimaeus may be physically blind at the beginning of this passage ... it’s the crowd that is spiritually blind.

And then he pushes us to ask the difficult question of whether that might at times be true of us as well.

It’s a tough lesson ... it’s a lesson we may prefer not to see ... but it’s a lesson we need to take some time to consider this morning.

With that in mind, let’s turn to our text now: Mark 10:46-52.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s Word for us this morning.

Mark writes:

<sup>10:46</sup> And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>48</sup> And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” <sup>49</sup> And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” <sup>50</sup> And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” <sup>52</sup> And Jesus said to

him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

### **Prayer of Illumination**

Lord, you have appointed your testimonies in righteousness  
and in all faithfulness.

Your promises are well tried,  
and we, your servants, love them.

Your righteousness is righteous forever,  
and your word is true.

Give us now understanding as we come to your word,  
that we might here find life.

Grant this, we ask, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.

[Based on Psalm 119:137-138, 140-144]

### **Introduction**

So where last week we focused on how Bartimaeus experienced these events, this week we’re considering how the crowd – how the bystanders to the miracle – experienced these events.

And as we do, what I think we see is that where we are tempted to arrogance with difficult people, Jesus calls us to serve them, to learn from them, and to walk alongside them as we follow him on the way.

Where we are tempted to arrogance with needy or difficult people, Jesus calls us to serve them, to learn from them, and to walk alongside them as we follow him on the way.

Let’s break that down together.

### **We Are Tempted to Arrogance with Difficult People**

First, our text brings out the fact that we are tempted to arrogance when we encounter difficult or needy people – and that includes difficult or needy people who profess faith in Christ.

That’s how many in the crowd would have seen Bartimaeus.

The crowd is big and excited, travelling together ... and Bartimaeus messes with the whole thing. He cries out, and tries to interrupt things. He brings his needs forward, while the crowd is focused on something else. His interruption of their excitement would have been frustrating and annoying. [Ferguson, 176; Wright, 144] His needs were not what they wanted to talk about. His loud calling out to Jesus would probably have made people nervous and uncomfortable. [Wright, 144]. His

demands for help probably felt like a distraction from the more exciting, and seemingly more important things that Jesus was doing on his way to Jerusalem.

And so, we read in verse 48, that the crowd rebuked him. They told him to be silent. They called on him to shut up – to leave them alone, to not disrupt their spiritual moment here with Jesus.

This is the attitude of the crowd. They found Bartimaeus – even as he professed to be a fellow believer – they found Bartimaeus difficult.

And the truth is ... we have people in our lives – including fellow believers – whom we find difficult.

Maybe for you it's someone you find difficult because of their sin: Because of a sin they have embraced, or excused, or repeatedly fallen back into, or that they seem inexplicably blind to. And maybe you've tried to be patient for a while ... but enough is enough. And now, you just want to be free of them – you just want them to leave you alone, to get out of your presence ... to be silent and not bother you anymore.

Or maybe there's someone you find especially difficult because of their need ... kind of like Bartimaeus. Maybe they too have a physical disability, or a debilitating illness ... and you don't blame them for it, but at this point, if you're honest, you kind of find it irritating, and it gets in your way.

Or maybe the person you struggle with has been deeply affected by a negative experience – some form of suffering in this life. They've gone through trials or trauma that have left them scarred in ways that make them more difficult to relate to, or to work with, or to be close to.

Or maybe the person you struggle with suffers from mental health challenges – whether more common challenges, like anxiety or depression ... or more rare difficulties, like neuro-divergence, or bipolar disorder, OCD, or schizophrenia ... and maybe the results of those struggles make them at times difficult to work with or relate to ... and you're tempted to push them away, or even to rebuke them for the trouble they're causing ... or to just tell them to shut up about their needs.

Or maybe it's a person close to you whose personality you just find difficult to work with.

Or perhaps it's someone at more of a distance, but whose presence you find troubling, and so you're tempted to ignore them – like members of our homeless population.

Whatever the details, we all encounter people who we find difficult to interact with, whether out in the world, here in the church, or within our own families.

Who is that for you? Who – especially among fellow believers – do you tend to find difficult to interact with?

And how do you tend to respond to them?

The crowd here, facing Bartimaeus, responded ultimately with arrogance – with a belief among themselves that they matter more than Bartimaeus does. Their place in the procession, their interests and excitement, their time, their spiritual experience in the moment – these things were all more important than whatever Bartimaeus needed.

That's why they rebuke him and try to silence him. At root, it's about arrogance.

And we too can suffer from the same kind of arrogance.

We too can be more concerned with our own insider-status to bother with the needs of an outsider – of someone less connected than we are – like Bartimaeus. Because we’re the kind of people that matter, we tell ourselves ... not them.

We too can feel like we just don’t want to be bothered – like those with needs, those who are difficult, must be someone else’s problem to deal with, and not ours. Because we’ve got more important things to do ... right?

We too can feel like our time is more important than their needs – and so we try to find a way to avoid them or get away from them, so that we can spend our times on things we believe are more important than them.

We too can feel like such people are annoying hurdles to our spiritual experiences, interrupting our Bible reading with their questions, disrupting our worship with their needs, disturbing our good mood in the narthex with their problems.

Of course ... we expect others to see our needs as part of their spiritual calling ... but when others want help from us, we so often see it as an imposition on the kind of spirituality we’d prefer to focus on, which is more vaguely pleasant and doesn’t involve dealing with other people’s needs.

It can take different forms ... but we’re all tempted to arrogance when we deal with difficult or needy people – including other believers.

And that’s what we see playing out with the crowd as our passage begins.

### **Jesus Calls Us to Serve Them**

But Jesus here, by his actions, calls us to something different.

And the first thing he calls us to do here is to serve those in need. Where we are tempted to arrogance with difficult people, Jesus calls us to serve them.

Now, if that lesson sounds familiar at this point ... that’s because it should be. We’ve covered it multiple times over the last few chapters of Mark’s Gospel.

It came up at the end of Mark 8, where Jesus called us to take up our cross and follow him.

It came up even more at the end of Mark 9, where Jesus told his disciples that “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.”

And it came up yet again in Mark 10, where Jesus called his disciples once more to servanthood as his followers.

We’ve covered this lesson a few times over the last few months, and so we might want to say: “Okay, we’ve covered it, let’s move on, we get it.”

But actually, I think one of the points Mark is making here is that we don't get it. We may have heard it several times. We may have nodded thoughtfully. We may have added our "Amen." But most of us still don't get it.

And Mark makes that point by showing us that the disciples still don't get it.

Just a few verses earlier, Jesus had said to his disciples: "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This is the lesson the disciples had just heard!

And so when Bartimaeus cries out for help ... this is their chance! The disciples should be shouting to each other: "Guys! This blind man is calling for help! I think this is one of those times when Jesus said we should be acting like servants! John, come with me and let's help this guy up, and bring him to Jesus! Andrew and Peter, you two go tell Jesus to come here – we've got someone who needs his help!"

That's what should have happened after the words Jesus spoke to them in the previous passage.

But instead, what happens when Bartimaeus cries out? We read it in verse 48: "Many rebuked him, telling him to be silent."

Now ... we aren't told who within the crowd was rebuking Bartimaeus ... though Luke mentions it was "those in front" of the procession – so it may have been the disciples. [See Luke 18:39 and Green, 664] We don't know for sure. But in any case, we don't hear that the disciples were trying to serve Bartimaeus either.

The disciples know what they're called to. But they're still not doing it.

And we can be the same sometimes. We can hear the sermons, we can agree with the sentiment ... but then we still fail to serve the difficult people the Lord puts before us.

And ... I get it. I struggle with this too. I recently found myself considering avoiding an opportunity to serve someone in need ... because I was going to use that time instead on one of these recent sermons ... one of the sermons about how we shouldn't avoid opportunities to serve people in need. Thankfully, the Lord helped me see the irony and hypocrisy in that, and I repented. But I understand the temptation.

Where might you struggle with that kind of hypocrisy? Where have you liked the idea of serving difficult people more than actually doing it? And where do you need to step out more, and serve those in need?

Let's get concrete: What steps might you take this week to do that better?

Maybe it's a change in how you relate to someone in your family, or at work, or at school

Or maybe it's a push to step out and serve with a ministry to people in need – maybe something like Tacoma Rescue Mission, which we'll hear more about in our evening service tonight.

Whether it's about joining a formal ministry, or about changing how you interact with someone the Lord has already placed in your life: Where is the Lord calling you to actually do what you know he's called you to do – to stop thinking about it, and actually take a concrete step towards loving service this week?

Where we are tempted to arrogance with difficult people, Jesus calls us to serve them.

### **Jesus Call Us to Learn From Them**

But our text doesn't stop there.

Because as we read on, we see that where we are tempted to arrogance with difficult people, Jesus calls us to serve them, and to learn from them.

And here Jesus calls us to an even deeper move, away from arrogance and towards humility.

Because the fact is, you can still be arrogant while serving others. You can do it in a condescending way, meeting their physical needs, all while patting yourself on the back for how much better you are than they are. Acts of service can be done in a way that humiliates those who receive it, and robs them of their dignity.

Now there are several ways Jesus calls us to reject this attitude.

But one of them we see here, is that Jesus calls us to learn from people we may find difficult – particularly from other Christians in need.

And specifically in this text, Jesus calls us to see not just what we have that they lack ... but to have eyes to see what they have that we lack. That's how we need to learn from them.

And that might actually be the most important lesson for Jesus's disciples to learn here.

Because just a few verses earlier, two of Jesus's closest disciples, James and John, came to Jesus and said "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And Jesus's response was to ask them: "What do you want me to do for you?" And they answered him: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

They responded to Jesus's question by asking for power and glory, which was not the right answer to that question.

And in that, James and John had revealed their own spiritual blindness. They don't even know what they most need.

But now, in the very next passage, Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus. And Jesus responds by asking Bartimaeus the very same question he asked James and John, word-for-word: "What do you want me to do for you?"

It's the same question. But where James and John got it wrong, Bartimaeus gets it right. [Edwards, 330; Wright, 144]

He doesn't ask for superiority or power, but for humble restoration. He doesn't want to lord it over others ... but he simply asks Jesus to restore him to what God had originally intended him to be. He humbly asked for restoration, rather than arrogantly asking for power.

And Jesus responds by saying "Your faith has made you well." – "Your faith has saved you."

Bartimaeus may have been physically blind. But he had better spiritual sight than James and John.

And if James and John had any sense at all, then they should have recognized that, and sought to learn from Bartimaeus.

James and John's superior social status, and their superior economic status, and their superior theological education did not make James and John spiritually superior to Bartimaeus. Instead, Bartimaeus proves himself to be more spiritually mature than they are. It's James and John who need to learn a spiritual lesson from this poor, disabled, and outcast man.

And often the same is true for us. We foolishly, and arrogantly, assume that because our finances are superior to someone else's, because our family life is more stable, or because we're more educated, or more successful in our career or our social standing, or we don't struggle with mental health the way they do, or we look more put together on Sundays – we assume from those kinds of things that we must also be spiritually superior to them. But Jesus here makes the point that that's not the case.

At least not when it comes to the kind of spirituality that Jesus values.

Where James and John had the most enviable theological education in history – three years of studying directly under Jesus ... Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, has more spiritual insight than they do here.

Where the rich young ruler, earlier in this same chapter, had wealth, and a position as an elder in the local church, and the respect of the people around him ... he couldn't give up his possessions to follow Jesus ... but Bartimaeus abandons what he has without a thought to follow Jesus on the way. That successful young elder needed to learn from this poor beggar what true Christian spirituality really was.

Friends ... we are a very respectable looking group of people. A lot of you are highly successful. There's a lot of wealth in this room. There's a lot of education and knowledge and intellectual ability here. Everybody this morning looks so nice and shiny.

In so many ways, we may look and we may feel superior to the kind of people we find difficult or frustrating or needy or burdensome.

But none of those things mean we're spiritually superior to such people.

None of those things mean we are closer to Jesus than others who profess Christ, but who look much less impressive, and seem more needy on the surface.

None of those things means what we have better spiritual insight than they do.

In fact, again and again the Bible teaches the opposite. It warns us that superior wealth is a temptation, not a spiritual aid. [e.g.: Mark 10:23-25, Matthew 6:24, 1 Timothy 6:9-10] It tells us that if we are wise in our own eyes, then there is more hope for a fool than for us. [Proverbs 26:12]

It tells us that our outward appearance can be deceiving, [e.g.: 1 Samuel 16:7, 1 Peter 3:3-4, Proverbs 31:30] maybe even to ourselves. It tells us that our religious and educational credentials amount to nothing compared to actually knowing Christ. [e.g.: Philippians 3:1-11]

It was Jesus who told the parable of the wealthy, successful rich man who ended up in hell, while Lazarus, the poor beggar who lived at his gate, wound up in heaven. [Luke 16:19-31]

How have you falsely assumed that your superiority in one area of life means you must be spiritually superior as well?

And who has God placed in your life, who professes faith in Jesus ... but who doesn't look as good as you on paper, or in person ... who maybe has a lot of circumstantial needs ... who you may find difficult – who has God placed in your life who's like all that ... but God's put them there so that you can learn from them, because their faith, and their Christian walk, is actually deeper and their faith is more robust than yours is, maybe because of the trials they've endured that you haven't?

When Bartimaeus cried out on the side of the road, I doubt the disciples thought he had anything to offer them.

But then Jesus called to him, and he revealed that Bartimaeus was actually a spiritual model for the disciples to imitate – that what the disciples had failed to live out themselves, Bartimaeus could teach them.

Learning that lesson would take humility.

Where is God calling you to such humility? In what relationship with a Christian who has challenges in their life – whom you maybe find difficult to deal with – what Christian like Bartimaeus is God calling you to learn from ... because despite all their external deficiencies, they actually have better spiritual sight than you do?

This is how Jesus sometimes chooses to instruct us. It's certainly how he instructs James and John here.

Will you learn through such people what Jesus wants to teach you?

Where we are tempted to arrogance with difficult people, Jesus calls us to serve them, and to learn from them.

### **Jesus Calls Us to Walk Alongside Them on the Way**

And with all that said, as we come to the end of our text, we see that Jesus calls us to walk alongside such people, as we follow Jesus together.

Where we are tempted to arrogance with difficult or needy people, Jesus calls us to serve them, to learn from them, and to walk alongside them as we follow Jesus together on the way.

Because we need one another.

And it's not just that they need us ... or that we just need them ... but we need one another.

It's mutual.

Think again of our text. After all this has happened, Bartimaeus joins the crowd, with the disciples, following Jesus on the way. That's what we're told in verse 52.

Over the next 20 miles, from Jericho to Jerusalem ... what would that actually look like?

Well ... Bartimaeus is going to need some help with some things. He probably has no food or money with him – he was begging just moments ago. He didn't pack a bag – he didn't even bring his cloak. And so he would have needs as they walked on the way, and as they arrived in Jerusalem. And Jesus's followers – including the twelve – should be helping him with those needs: sharing their food, donating their resources, maybe even finding him an extra cloak.

Also, Bartimaeus would want more information. He had heard and learned something about Jesus, which led him to faith. But there was much more to know. Perhaps James and John could provide that education for him.

Bartimaeus would need things from Jesus's close followers.

But also, Jesus's followers needed something from Bartimaeus.

As they walked on the way, and prepared for their arrival in Jerusalem, they needed to learn about his faith, and his trust in Jesus, so that they could better imitate it. They should ask him how he came to trust Jesus so firmly and so quickly. They should ask how he knew that Jesus was the Son of David – the Messiah. And at some point, James and John should approach Bartimaeus themselves, and ask him how he had known to ask Jesus for humble restoration, rather than selfish domination, like they did.

It's not that just Bartimaeus has needs, or that just James and John have needs – they all have needs. And God has brought them together, uniquely equipped, for each person to serve the needs of the other.

And that's what God continues to do in the Church today: to gather and connect followers of Jesus, whom he's equipped to serve and bless one another.

Speaking of believers that God gathers in the Church, the Apostle Paul writes this – he says:

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. [...]

For just as the body is one and has many members, [...] so it is with Christ. [...] [And] God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. [...]

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. [...]

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. [1 Corinthians 10]

Every believer has a role in building up other members of the Body, and every believer needs to be served by other members of the Body in order to be healthy.

Which means that in some way, you need those Christians you find especially difficult that God has placed in your family, or in your church, or at work, or at school, or in your neighborhood ... or on the streets of our city.

Jesus was not a fool when he formed his Body as he did – he was not a fool when he put that particular difficult Christian in your life specifically.

He’s working all things together for your good, just as he promised – including the placement of that individual in your life [Romans 8:28].

Have you failed to see that?

Have you failed to respond rightly it – with humble and loving service, and teachability?

If so, God, in his word, is now holding Bartimaeus up to you ... and he’s urging us to learn from him, and then respond rightly to those people he has put around us that we find difficult.

What steps will you take this week to do that?

Where we are tempted to arrogance with difficult and needy people, Jesus calls us to serve them, to learn from them, and to walk alongside them as we follow him together on the way.

## **Conclusion**

Of course ... in a greater sense ... we all are difficult people – especially to our Lord.

But even so ... when he came, he served us. And even now, he walks alongside us.

And if he has done that for us – when our needs and difficulties sent him to the cross ... then surely we can similarly come alongside our brothers and sisters ... and serve them, and learn from them, rather than arrogantly putting ourselves above them.

For we are Christ's Body. And he is our Head. And as he gathers us together, and knits us together, he is leading us to the True Jerusalem – to his heavenly city.

And so let us follow him together on the way.

Amen.

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### **This sermon draws on material from:**

- Bayer, Hans. Introduction and notes to Mark in *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.  
Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.  
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Horne, Mark. *The Victory According to Mark: An Exposition of the Second Gospel*. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003.  
Keller, Timothy. *Jesus the King*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2011.  
Wright, N.T. *Mark for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church’s core value of “Reformed Catholicity”), and also (following the Apostle Paul’s example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a

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