

Loving God –give us the sight we so desperately need, to see and to know the gift of grace that you so freely give. Amen.

Is Bartimaeus blind because he's a beggar? Or is he a beggar because he's blind? Has lack of access to proper food led to his blindness? Perhaps his lack of sight has denied him the opportunity to earn a living. He wasn't always blind. In the reading we hear him ask Jesus to let him see *again*. So there was a time when he could see.

As is so often the case – there is an obstacle between Jesus and the person seeking him. 'Many of the people' – are between Bartimaeus and Jesus.

'The people' – as Mark calls them – might not have anything to do with his being blind – but they certainly are invested in his being a beggar. They tell him to keep quiet. They like him just the way he is – blind and dependent! What might happen if he's healed?

He'd be out there competing for a job. The crowd probably thinks that he might take a job away from 'one of us' who really *deserves* a job.

We'd all be better off – if he'll just stay blind – stay a beggar – and especially – stay quiet!
Which of course – he does not. *He cried out!* Mark tells us.

Not only cried out – but addresses Jesus as the *Son of David*. We've been reading and listening to Mark's gospel for almost a year – and this is the first time that a *human* has called Jesus the *Son David*. Bartimaeus might have been blind but he saw something that other people didn't. He saw that Jesus was someone who could help him. And so he cries out – and Jesus hears him. Jesus asks for the crowd to back off – and to let Bartimaeus come forward.

In today's lesson we see again the genius of Mark's story-telling.

Two weeks ago we watched while Jesus encountered the rich, young, ruler along the way. The man who was so tied to his possessions that he turned away when Jesus called him to follow. And today – old Bartimaeus is a blind, beggar, sitting along the side of the road. And at the call of Jesus, he leaps to his feet and throws off his cloak.

His possession mean nothing to him, compared to the call from Jesus.

And next, Mark pulls out all that stops in his rhetorical and story-telling. He asks Bartimaeus the exact-same-question that he asked those knuckle-heads James and John last week.

What do you want me to do for you?

Imagine that: You find yourself, standing in front of Jesus Nazareth, and *he* asks you – *What do you want me to do for you?*

James & John think it's all about power and prestige and position. They want to sit at the right and left hand of Jesus. Bartimaeus? All he wants to do – is to be able to see. *Just let me see again.*

Last week Jesus told James & John that they they'd better be careful what they asked for – because they were liable to get it. This week, Jesus simply grants Bartimaeus request. *Deal!* Jesus says. You've got your sight back.

Again, in contrast to the rich, young, ruler, Bartimaeus begins to follow Jesus along the way. In Mark's the gospel, the way leads to only one place. Jerusalem and the cross.

Bartimaeus is the last person in Mark's gospel to encounter and respond to Jesus before Jerusalem and the cross. If we were reading the gospel in exact sequence, the very next verse beings the story of Palm Sunday. But that must have seemed okay to Bartimaeus. It was okay because he had been transformed.

He heard the call of Jesus. He heard Jesus ask him: *What do you want me to do for you?*

Bartimaeus was transformed from someone sitting alone along the side of the road, to someone who went 'along the way' with Jesus.

As is always the case, the cry of Bartimaeus to Jesus was answered in ways for beyond what he could have possibly asked or imagined. Are we willing to take the same risk?

Can we risk being transformed?

That's an important question. Because we are always at risk of becoming '*the crowd*'. Trying to silence those who we think might compete for God's attention.

Can we find it in ourselves to walk away from the crowd, and to become *more like* blind, begging Bartimaeus? If we want to be transformed by our own encounter 'along the way' then each must find it within ourselves to cry out.

Jesus have mercy on me, Bartimaeus cried.

That cry of Bartimaeus has become one of the most ancient prayers of our faith. Kyrie Elison – Lord have mercy.

If we can take the risk of crying out Kyrie Elison – we had better to be ready for the response that is always on the heart of God – *What do you want me to do for you?*

God is ready to transform our lives, just as thoroughly as the life of Bartimaeus is transformed in today's gospel.

When we come to the altar rail today perhaps those words can be on our lips. Kyrie Elison.

Put yourself today in the place of poor, blind, begging Bartimaeus. Kyrie Elison. Kyrie Elison. Kyrie Elison.