

2 Bartimaeus

(Mark 10:46-52)

It was just an ordinary day really. Well when it started that is, but it didn't stay ordinary for very long. I was woken at dawn as people started to pass by. It had been a cold night, a very cold night, and as I tried to stretch my arms and legs the whole of the dark and weighty drudgery of the day seemed to press down on me. Sitting, begging, spitting, insults, and worse, much worse. But then I was used to it. I'd done the same each day for over twenty years and nothing ever changed, or so I thought.

I struggled to my feet, felt my way around the walls of the stable that old Ruben let me sleep in and went out into the street. I knew the way well enough but I always talked myself through it. I don't know why but I suppose it was sort of a comfort in some way. Follow the wall for about fifty paces until I felt the corner of Laburn's workshop. Then ten paces across the street to the town wall, turn right, twenty paces further along and out through the gate. Ten more paces and then shuffle to the left and sit.

It usually takes a while for the hustle and bustle of passers by to build up. There's not much money in begging at the best of times, but there was often bread, maybe a little fruit, a few coins, enough to keep me going anyway.

This morning though things seemed different. I was sure that there were many more people around than usual; people seemed to be gathering rather than just passing by. There was excited chatter and soon I could tell that I was in the middle of a crowd, surrounded by people who were pressing around me in their eagerness to see something or someone.

"He's coming," I heard people say, "He's coming."

There were two women chattering beside me.

"What's all the fuss about?" I asked them, "Who's coming?"

And then they said it. Those words I'd heard from others. Those words I'd dreamed about. Those words that I dare not imagine I would ever really hear.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said, "he's coming this way on his way to Jerusalem."

Their words sent a shiver through my body. Jesus of Nazareth, the person they all talk about, the teacher, the master, the Christ, the messiah, the healer. This Jesus was about to pass by, to pass by me.

The noise of the crowd grew louder, there were cheers and shouts. Somehow I knew that I had to do something and I had to do it now. A feeling welled up inside of me, a feeling I'd never known before. It felt as if this was the moment, the moment my life had been destined for. As if this was the reason that I had been born and struggled through my wretched life for for the past 35 years. The feeling

took hold of me and, throwing aside all of my usual reticence and reluctance to make a fuss, before I knew it I was shouting: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!"

"Oh shut up!" came a voice from behind me.

"Stay in your place and shut your mouth beggar," said another voice as I felt a sharp kick land square in my back. But I was used to this, it was nothing new and had never stopped me before. I took a deep breath and, with all the energy I could find, shouted again: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!! Je....."

Suddenly I realised that everything had gone quiet, completely quiet. I didn't know what to do. Should I carry on shouting or ... but then I heard it, the voice I will never forget.

"Bring him here," it said, "Bring him here." Somehow I knew he was talking to me. I threw my cloak and begging bowl to one side and leapt to my feet. I took a step forward into the darkness, hands gently pushed me forward step by step. "Cheer up, its your lucky day mate," people said and then ... and then I heard that voice again.

"What do you want me to do for you?" it asked.

I have to admit that just for a second I almost didn't ask, I almost bottled out, waves of doubt crashed over me. "Could I ask? What if he didn't?" But somehow the courage seized me. Somehow something inside of me, or maybe outside of me, I don't know, but something filled me with a confidence that was not my own. Suddenly I heard myself saying: "Teacher, I want to see,"

There was silence, I sensed something near my face, something moving, was he turning away and leaving? They say he didn't touch me, but whether he touched me with his hands or not, he did touch me, I felt it. I felt something touch my eyes. Gently, lovingly, softly, he touched my eyes and said: "Go, your faith has healed you."

I stood there for a second, my eyes tightly shut, hardly daring to open them. Everyone was silent, everyone was waiting, waiting for me.

Nothing could have prepared me for what was about to happen. I opened my eyes, and it was like the colours, the brilliance, it was like everything exploded in my head. I blinked a few times as I struggled to take it all in, and then I realised what I was looking at. A face, ears, eyes, nose, mouth, but more ... much more, a face that said in every way: "I love you." A face that as it looked at you you knew knew you, not just on the outside but on the inside. Not just skin deep, but in the depths of your heart.

It could only have been a fraction of a second. The next thing I heard myself say was: "I can see! I can see!" The crowd erupted into cheers and dancing and celebration. Jesus turned to continue his journey, and I? Well, I followed him on the way.

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