

31 years ago, I sat in my first preaching class. Back in the day, I would have looked at this story and would have leaned into Matt Skinner's approach on Bartimaeus have an active faith and preached a four-point sermon even though we were instructed to try to keep it to three. The four points would have been the following:

- Bartimaeus grasped who Jesus was
- Bartimaeus persisted despite the hinderance
- Bartimaeus expects a transformation
- Bartimaeus asks for the right thing

I would have then spent about five minutes within each point and then wrapped it up with a good conclusion to help you remember those four points.

Now, I like to look at the stories from multiple angles, wrestle with the text and then share where I wrestled with it. It is my hope that by doing that, it can help you wrestle with the text.

So, let's do something different this morning. I am going to take a poll and see what you think. Please don't be bashful. I will ask the question, give you two options then I will repeat the options, asking you to raise your hand on the option that fits you. Now, don't worry, there is really no right or wrong answer.

When you heard the story of Bartimaeus, did you hear a miracle story or did you hear a call story? Are you ready to vote? Here we go:

If you hear the story of Bartimaeus as a miracle story, raise your hand!

If you hear the story of Bartimaeus as a call story, raise your hand!

This is what I pondered as I began to write the sermon for the day. I think that the story can be seen as both but depending on which way you view the story, determines how you may interpret the text and, in my case, how you might preach the text in the hopes that the hearers will help them in their relationship with God and strengthen their walk while giving them encouragement until we meet again.

I do not want to sound like a broken record but I want to share again that Mark is all about sandwiches. A story within a story. Well, today's story does not have that but, it is the end of a big sandwich.

Mark 8:22 through Mark 10:52 is one long section of Mark. It starts with a healing of a blind man and it ends with a story of a blind man, Bartimaeus.

The healing of Bartimaeus occurs in Jericho which is seventeen miles north of Jerusalem. They are almost there. It has been a six-month journey. During the sandwich period of the healings of blindness, the disciple's eyes have not been open to who Jesus true identity is. They also do not understand or comprehend Jesus purpose. Bartimaeus understands.

If we would read the whole section together, we would grasp the beauty of Mark's writing. We would see the whole picture of faith, discipleship, bearing witness and the dangers of abandoning religious beliefs.

With all of that being said, let us use the last half of the sermon to dive deeper into the story that we heard. I read and reread this text at least ten times in the preparation of the sermon and I could not get away from the crowd trying to silence Bartimaeus.

He is not the first one that the followers have tried to silence. If you remember, the disciples tried to silence the exorcist. They were also trying to silence the children and keep them from Jesus.

Bartimaeus would not be silence. He cried out even louder.

Jesus calls for him.

Bartimaeus throws away his cloak and comes to Jesus.

On the surface, this may not seem like a big deal. However, it is a huge deal. The cloak is most likely his only possession. It is the possession that he uses to collect the money that he begs for at the gate.

Bartimaeus literally throws away everything to go and follow Jesus. It was only a few weeks ago that we heard about the rich young man walk away with a heavy heart because he was unwilling to give away everything and follow Jesus.

Bartimaeus, a model disciple.

So, maybe the question that I asked in the beginning of the sermon should have had a third option. The third option being both.

Yes, it is a miracle story, he was a man who was blind, but now he sees.

Yes, it is a call story, he was at work on the roadside, Jesus calls to him and he follows; no questions asked.

Jesus called Peter, James, and John; who were working. He called Levi, who was working; they left it all and followed him.

Bartimaeus is in contrast to our recent story. We had disciples fighting for the top spot in that story. In this story, Bartimaeus teaches us that seeing and understanding has much more value than places of power and privilege.

There are so many angles to the silencing.

Have individuals tried to silence you on your dreams and passions?

Have we tried to silence individuals who simply want to come to Jesus? You know, because there are important things going on and that may de-rail the process.

Bartimaeus, the model disciple. He gave up everything to follow Jesus. I think many times, we are scared of the model disciple. That's just a little too radical; right?

We love the life that we are living. I mean, we might not be totally happy with our lives and we could use a little Jesus add-on but a complete discipleship may affect the status quo; right?

I mean, there are probably many who would say, "PJ, challenge us but don't take the challenge too far." C'mon now, you can tell that we are fans of Jesus. We are here in church and we will sing the songs and follow along with the scripture and liturgy. But, don't tell us that those checklist items are not really following Jesus is about.

Shhhh, PJ.

So, today, I will not push too much.

Today, I will simply ask you to follow Bartimaeus in these examples:

- Don't let individuals silence you when you want to follow Jesus at all cost
- Don't be afraid to call out to Jesus
- Don't be scared to ask Jesus for what you need
- Don't be shy when you hear the words of Jesus when he says, "Follow me"

We looked at another Markian sandwich. Sight-Seeing miracles as the bread and disciples having trouble seeing in-between. May we as God to open our eyes to the blindness in our lives and truly hear and follow the call that Jesus has for our life. **Amen.**