



GOSPEL GOSSIP

'What do you want me to do for you?'

Mark 10. 46-52

Sunday 27 October 2024

Many people will be familiar with this story told by St Mark about a blind man who is given his sight back again by Jesus. Unusually for the Gospels, we know the man's name; it is not often we precisely who the person was who was healed. Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. Not only do we know the man's name, but also his father's – spelt out for us, although that is what Bar-Timaeus means. It is as though Mark is deliberately emphasising the reality of this miracle. But why this one?

Jesus is accosted by Bartimaeus, who is making such a nuisance of himself that others tell him to keep quiet. Is it because of the racket he's making, or what he is shouting – 'Have mercy on me?'. In the space of just 15 verses since he last asked the question, Jesus once again asks, 'What do you want me to do for you?' Those around him might have wondered who was the one who was blind – Bartimaeus, who was blind, or Jesus who couldn't see what the matter was. Again, a suppliant, someone asking a favour, recognises the authority and lineage of Jesus and makes a request. In three weeks we have James and John wanting the best seats in heaven; the rich man wanting to inherit eternal life; and now we have Bartimaeus wanting mercy.

- Are you too blind to see that Jesus is the Son of David, the promised Saviour?
- Do you feel a need for mercy?
- Do others try to shut you up?
- Are you prevented by blindness of recognising Jesus in your life?
- Do you believe that Jesus listens to you?

There are so many facets to blindness in this passage. The most obvious one is of course Bartimaeus' inability to see. But what about the others' 'blindness'? Those who could not see that Bartimaeus had just as much right to see Jesus. Those who did not see a man called Bartimaeus, but a blind beggar who was a drain on the common purse. Those who could not see that sacrifice was the cost of discipleship. Those who thought they were more worthy and had prior claim.

Let's not forget what Bartimaeus shouted at Jesus – 'have mercy'. In Jesus' time, sickness and disability were often associated with sin. Illness, mental or physical was considered a punishment. So to suffer such a disability as blindness, having once been able to see, Bartimaeus must have been very sinful, and his lack of vision was directly related to something he had done. His cry for mercy was interpreted as an appeal for clemency in a justified sentence. Did those thronging Jesus truly appreciate that in crying for mercy, Bartimaeus was recognising Jesus' ability to forgive sin (whatever that sin might have been) or else recognising Jesus as a source of deliverance or 'just' one who was infinitely compassionate?

- How much do you think of suffering being the person's just desserts?
- In what ways does sin affect your relationship with Jesus?
- Do you regard Jesus as the source of forgiveness?
- How does Jesus deliver you?
- Is Jesus infinitely compassionate?

Once again, Mark, through a seemingly straight-forward account of an 'ordinary' healing, gives us so many layers of meaning and interpretation, so let's make full use of what we hear or read.