

Sermon Transcript**The Rev. Carol Duncan****10.27.24****What Do You Want Me To Do For You?**

Come, Holy Spirit, renew us, transform us, and send us so that we can share your life-giving love, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Today's Gospel describes Jesus' last stop before arriving at Jerusalem. We've reached the pivot point where Jesus' life turns toward his death. Now we hear about a healing and a call. It asks us if we are ready to love even a beggar on the road. Please enter the story with me. Let your mind add the sound effects, feel the breeze and smell the smells.

We are in Jericho, an ancient city. We are walking with a large crowd surrounding Jesus on the road about 20 miles from Jerusalem. We are going on the annual pilgrimage to Passover, to our remembrance of being freed from slavery in Egypt. Many are following Jesus. Others are just going to Passover as they do each year. All are talking together. On the way out of the city a disturbance attracts our attention.

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And louder - "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

We see it is a blind beggar wrapped in a cloak with part of it stretched out to receive coins of begging. Someone who knows him says it is Bartimaeus, who has been blind for a long time. Someone must have told him it is Jesus passing by. He calls out louder still. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

We try to hush him up. It is not seemly to shout out to disturb us on the way to Jerusalem for our solemn pilgrimage. Hush man. Stop your shouting. That's no way to act while we are trying to keep our faith by going to Passover. We try to move on but Jesus stops. So we stop.

Jesus says to us - directly to us who are close to the shouting beggar - Call him here.

We don't know Jesus well, but we know enough about him to listen when he talks to us. We stop hushing this Bartimaeus. We say instead, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." We are really interested now. We are on Bartimaeus' side. We go silent. We watch as Bartimaeus throws off his cloak. He scatters the coins that people have piously tossed onto his cloak as he was begging.

Bartimaeus pays no attention to the money he had gathered. It goes flying. We guide Bartimaeus to Jesus, then wait to see what will happen.

Jesus says to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus answers Jesus clearly and sincerely and achingly “My teacher, let me see again.”

Jesus replies “Go; your faith has made you well.”

We all stand still in amazement. Bartimaeus grabs our hands. He looks at us. He sees us.

We have seen a true miracle. We surround Bartimaeus as we all go on toward Jerusalem. We walk with a man touched and healed by God through the words of Jesus. We feel healed too. A beggar is given sight. I feel healed of some unguessed blindness.

Here’s what strikes me about this story. First, I wanted to be there. I almost feel like I was there, sharing this story with you.

Second, how truly awesome it was for Bartimaeus to throw off the cloak that had been his livelihood and his shelter for so long. That cloak held all his coins. It kept him warm in the chill of the nights. It was his only shelter in the elements. How brave and decisive to cast it off having faith that he wouldn’t need it anymore. He begged because he had no other way to make a living due to his blindness. But he kept a sense of possibility. He could give up his cloak in exchange for new life.

Third, what struck me was how the crowd changed almost as miraculously as Bartimaeus. They went from scorning and hushing Bartimaeus to communicating Jesus’ call to him. They felt the call themselves. Take heart, they said. Jesus is calling you. The rest of the walk to Jerusalem was more than a remembering pilgrimage. It became a possibility of new life and new faith for all who walked it. They followed Jesus in a new way because of Bartimaeus.

Fourth, the question to us is the same as that to Bartimaeus. Jesus asks us “What do you want me to do for you?” What do you want to be healed of? If healing changes you, are you willing to give up your security as Bartimaeus did? “What do you want me to do for you?”

Here is how I respond. What I want Jesus to help me do most deeply in response to this story is to consistently show love for my neighbor. My neighbor is all of you, and also the person I meet at

Wawa or on the bus, even if they act out like Bartimaeus did. It would take a miracle for me to behave that way all the time.

Part of that loving would be to remember always to ask what is my neighbor's wish, what does my neighbor want of me, like Jesus did with Bartimaeus. If my neighbor seems to be seeking help or assistance I must remember to ask what can I do to be helpful? One thing I am pretty clear about for myself is that when my neighbor asks for money on a street corner somewhere, my response is to give two or three dollars. I have realized that that is their profession, after all, how they spend the main part of their day supporting themselves. I see giving money as a way to be respectful of someone's difficult life journey when I can't possibly know their story and don't want to judge. Begging is an ancient profession in this unequal world of ours. It's how Bartimaeus supported himself. Jesus didn't scorn him, but asked what he could do. I carry a supply of dollar bills for this purpose, as I learned to do years ago from a long-time member of this congregation.

Especially in the week when Gustavo Gutiérrez has died, it is fitting to tell the story of Bartimaeus. Gutierrez was the Peruvian priest who was the father of liberation theology, proclaiming solidarity with poor and marginalized people. "We love God by loving our neighbor," Father Gutiérrez contended. "Only then will God be with us."

In remembrance of Bartimaeus and of Gustavo Gutierrez, I say with Bartimaeus My teacher, let me see. I add, let me love.

Amen.