

# "On the Road from Jericho"

A sermon from the pulpit of  
First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

Mark 10:46-52  
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I like Bartimaeus.

I like Bartimaeus' persistence. I like his boldness. He shouts out for Jesus. And when people tell him to be quiet, he shouts louder. This man is going to be heard. He won't let decorum or embarrassment stand in his way. He wants something. He reaches for it.

I miss opportunities because I'm often too shy to step up.

When I could be of service as a disciple, sometimes I don't volunteer soon enough and somebody else gets to do it. Or whatever it was that needed getting done, goes forever undone. It's too late. The opportunity came only to me, and I let it slip away.

Bartimaeus invites me to be attentive. To speak up. Step up. Raise my hand. And, if need be, shout.

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I like Bartimaeus because even though he's blind, he's perceptive. Even though his eyes don't work, he sees Jesus for who he is: Son of David. Man of God. Merciful. Powerful. A man worth calling up. A prophet. A healer. Some of Jesus' followers—even those with 20/20 vision—were slow to recognize Jesus for who he was. But a blind beggar saw in Jesus a man of God. Bartimaeus would later learn more about Jesus, but here on this Jericho road he could read the signs even though he couldn't see the signs.

I fear that even though my vision is pretty good, there's much in life I don't see. You know that joke about the man who stays in his how even though a flood is coming. The sheriff drives by in a station wagon and offers the man a ride to higher ground. "No sheriff," the man says. "I trust God and God alone." The waters rise and rise. The Sheriff returns in a boat. "I don't need you sheriff. I trust in God and God alone to deliver me." Finally, as the house is floating away, the sheriff comes in a helicopter and drops a rope to the wet man clinging to his roof. "I don't need you rope, sheriff. I trust God to deliver me."

The man dies, goes to heaven, and asks God why didn't you come for me?

God says, "I did come for you. I came in a pick-up truck, in a boat, and in a helicopter."

I love that old chestnut.

But this joke hurts me a little bit, because I'm often that man. I don't see God's delivering grace even though it's right in front of me. My jadedness prevents me from seeing hope. My worry narrows my vision, so that I don't see God; I only see trouble. I see the crime and brokenness in our city, but I don't see the healing and the laughter; but it's here! Grace abounds every day at the Cunningham Children's Home, and at the DREAM house, and in the hallways of Carle Hospital, and in the classrooms of our schools, and in our grocery stores, and in our choir room.

Sometimes, I see all of the bad stuff but none of God's good.

People who survey religious institutions in our country tell us that churches are, generally, shrinking in our country. People are finding other things to do besides being connected to houses of worship. Families spend more time playing club soccer, maybe, or traveling—whatever. What's going to happen to the church if people slowly, slowly stop coming? What will happen if our kids or grandkids don't take church as seriously as we do?

Sometimes I miss yesterday's bigger church so much so that I fail to see the beauty of today's church.

(A Sunday school teacher once asked her class of children, "Why do we need to be quiet in worship?" A bright little girl said, "Because everybody's sleeping.")

I need to wake up. I need my eyes checked. I need my heart checked.

Bartimaeus had perspective. Bartimaeus saw the possibility of God's grace even though he was blind.

I like this man.

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I like Bartimaeus' eagerness. When Jesus asked to see him, Bartimaeus springs up. He doesn't drag his feet. Bartimaeus is open to the possibility of a miracle.

I'm often am not.

But my friend Bartimaeus is abounding in hope. He has every reason to be down and out; he's a beggar, after all. Instead, he leaps up when an opportunity arises.

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Jesus healed Bartimaeus' eyes. Arguably, that's the climax of this story. But that's certainly not the end of the story, is it? Mark tells us that Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way. Bartimaeus became a follower.

I imagine a lifetime of energetic, faithful service from Old Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus. I'd like to think that Bartimaeus ended up in a place like this: a community of disciples gathered in Christian worship to thank God, endeavoring every day to follow God's son Jesus.

I've come to believe that I'm looking into the eyes of Bartimaeus' descendants when I look at you. When I see your enthusiasm, your courage, your persistence it looks familiar. I've seen it before. On the road from Jericho there was a guy named Bartimaeus. You and he look familiar. There's something about your eyes that reminds me of his.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.

**Mark 10:46-52** <sup>46</sup>They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup>When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>48</sup>Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" <sup>49</sup>Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." <sup>50</sup>So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup>Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." <sup>52</sup>Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.