

PILGRIM C H U R C H

An open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ

THEY CAME TO JERICHO

Mark 10:46-52 October 25, 2009

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They came to Jericho. Marks' gospel is a story of Jesus and his disciples on the road. They are on a journey to Jerusalem. That image of being on the road, on The Way, is a good image for us as we seek to witness of faith to others. Many times we find ourselves traveling to visit with people who need words of comfort, words of encouragement. It might be traveling to the hospital, going into the family room at the funeral home or going across the country in a plane to visit a friend. Sometimes our traveling is just across the street to see a neighbor or picking up the phone to send caring thoughts – but our speaking of faithful words often means going to be with them, journeying on THE WAY. So, this idea of being on the go is not something foreign to us.

In our text for today, Jesus is leaving Galilee and going toward Jerusalem. It is the story of the last healing in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus has healed other blind people before, but this one is different. The blind beggar has a name, Bartimaeus. It is an Aramaic name which means "Son of Timaeus" or "Son of Honor."

Jesus and his disciples are in a crowd of people. They are leaving Jericho. The blind man hears it is Jesus. He begins to cry out to Jesus as "Son of David." It is the common title used by those who want Jesus to enter Jerusalem, chase out the Romans and set up the Kingdom of Israel as it was under King David. The irony is that this messianic title given to him by Bartimaeus will be rejected by Jesus in Jerusalem. Like the disciples, Bartimaeus sees, but only in part. The crowd tries to silence the blind man. "Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he just cries out all the more." Not one of the crowd or disciples speak up for Bartimaeus until Jesus himself orders the crowd, "Call him here." It is interesting to me that many times it seems we become a part of some group, indeed part of a church, and then we forget what it is like to be without hope, without anyone to speak up for us. Once Jesus stopped and asked them to call the man, then the crowd takes up this pious hospitality role, saying, "Take heart; get up; he is calling you." In this command, "Call him here," Jesus is also commanding the gathered crowd and the disciples to become the very followers they claim to be. Jesus is asking them to be obedient to the call to follow after him and reach out to the blind, the lame, the lepers, the poor – the very people like themselves, want to be near to Jesus. This cry of need that caused Bartimaeus to be shunned by many becomes the occasion to teach all of us that, like us, the needy want a glimpse of God.

We call this glimpse of God a miracle. Miracles are those events that bring people from darkness into the light. Miracles turn our attention to what really matters in life and in death. Miracles reveal the activity of God. Too often, we get so concerned about needs of the congregation that are manageable, but we let them buffer us from those around us on the margins calling out for help. I mean, we have important issues in front of us, a new

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space, a full-time minister, a stewardship pledge to make. Yet here is this man, who throws off his cloak and comes to Jesus. That cloak may not seem much to us. But it was probably his only shelter, it was his blanket and cover when he slept. That cloak is probably the most important, most precious possession that he owns. Bartimaeus comes to Jesus with great expectation. He understands that this as a chance for him to see. He is willing to give up that cloak if he can see. What is it that is so precious to us that it binds us, it keeps us from giving our best attempt to follow after Jesus?

Do you hear the question that Jesus asks him? "What do you want me to do for you?" Do you remember that is the same question that Jesus asked James and John when they wanted him to grant whatever they asked of him? Jesus responded to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Well, we want to sit on your right and your left when you come into your glory." No activity of God there. "Bartimaeus, what do you want me to do for you?" "Rabbi, let me see again." Rabbi. It is a title of honor. Does Bartimaeus comprehend that discipleship will involve teaching, learning, understanding, seeing, and hearing? I don't know, I can only hope so.

I do know that this blind man is known by his name. Think back on the other people that Jesus healed. We don't know their names. Maybe we know his name because the text says that gaining his sight, he followed Jesus on the way. Who knows, maybe when Mark was writing his gospel someone told him, "Sure, I remember Bartimaeus. He used to teach in our church in Galilee. He is the one Jesus healed so he could see. I remember him."

That just may be the point of our text for today. To know, to see and to believe in Jesus is to follow him on the way. We sing praise, we offer thanks, we admire and respect the commitment of Jesus. Bartimaeus is remembered because he followed Jesus on the way. One more thing about our text for today. It begins with the words, "They came to Jericho." It is a place remembered because a blind man received his sight and followed Jesus on the way. Do you remember the places in your life that caused you to change the direction of your living? I was mad at the mission board because they waited until the last minute to tell me I could not go as a missionary to Brazil. The district superintendent, who had been my pastor, tried to help me get past anger. Finally, after a couple of weeks, he came by to ask, "Are you just going to spend the rest of your life being angry." At the time I wanted to answer and probably did, "Yes!" But that was my Jericho. I realized that I needed to change my attitude, my way of living. Have you ever been there? That place that caused you to change your whole outlook on life.

I believe we have been there as a church. It took us awhile, but I think we realized we had to make a change if we were going to exist as a church. It was a tough decision, but we sold our property and set out on this journey, this way to be a community of faith. Like Bartimaeus, we don't know where it will lead us, but I believe we are on the way. And I believe it is the way in which God is calling us to walk. Let us be faithful as we follow Jesus on THE WAY.