

The Healer: The Oppressed

Mark 10:46-52

We're in a sermon series called The Healer, looking at some of the miraculous healings found in the book of Mark. Each week we've encountered a different story, a different situation, a different need. But in each week, we've seen the same Healer, Jesus. If you are joining us for the first time or if you have been away this summer, I'd encourage you to download the Chapel Hill App and listen to this series. Because in this series, we've seen what Jesus can do with our doubts, and our impossible situations, and our fears. And we've seen that Jesus is compassionate, that he hears us in our desperation, that he has the power to heal in the most extreme circumstances. I have been so encouraged by our preaching team in this series, and I have been so encouraged by the testimonies of people who have experienced healing, like our sister Anita. Aren't these videos incredible?

Our passage today is from Mark 10:46-52. This passage is the last healing miracle of the earthly ministry of Jesus in the Gospel. At the center of this story is Jesus and bold blind beggar named Bartimaeus. And this passage is really fun. Am I allowed to say that? Well, it is! It's fun, and it's loud! In fact, most of the dialogue is shouting. So, put in your earplugs and hear the word of the Lord.

And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart. Get up; he is calling you." 50 And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 And Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And the blind man said to him, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." 52 And Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

The roads in and out of Jericho would have been busy this time of year, full of pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to observe the Passover feast. A feast that commemorated how the Lord passed over the houses of the Israelites when they were enslaved in Egypt and struck down the Egyptians but spared his people. It was customary that every Jewish family would travel to Jerusalem, bringing with them a lamb to sacrifice as a memorial that their God is a God who saves. So, the road to Jericho would have been teeming with holiday travelers and lambs. Imagine the noise!

Those who weren't able to make the trek to Jerusalem would line the road, and perhaps would get a glimpse of the well-known, or alms from the well-to-do. At first glance, it appears that was

what Bartimaeus was doing, collecting alms. To the passerby, Bartimaeus was nothing more than a beggar, divinely judged, cursed even with blindness, at the mercy of those who might pity him and

toss him some spare shekels. But things aren't always as they appear though, are they? Because as we continue in our passage, it quickly becomes evident that there is more to this guy than his blindness and his begging. If I had to pick one word to describe Bartimaeus it would probably be brash, but if I chose a second word, it would be persistent. Bartimaeus was persistent in his belief of who Jesus was, he was persistent in his prayer, and he was persistent in his commitment to follow Jesus.

Bartimaeus was persistent in his belief and proclamation of who Jesus was. Remember, this is the last healing of Jesus. Word had spread about what Jesus was doing, what Jesus was teaching. You can imagine that as Bartimaeus sat by the side of the road each day, that he had heard a thing or two about Jesus. He had heard that Jesus could heal with just a touch, or with just a word. As he sat there in his personal darkness, he had a lot of time to ruminate, to think about who this Jesus was and how he had the power to do the things that he was doing. And he had come to some conclusions. Somehow, Bartimaeus, sitting in his personal darkness had come to the conclusion that Jesus of Nazareth was not just a teacher and a healer, but the longed-for King, the Messiah. And so, as he sat there in his dark world, picture this with me. Bartimaeus sat beside the road, he could hear a great crowd of people coming his way, he asked what's going on, someone said, "it's Jesus of Nazareth." THE Jesus. What's a blind man to do?

He started yelling and screaming. The word used means to shriek, it's the same word used to describe the cry of the demon possessed man in last week's sermon. He yelled, "JESUS! SON OF DAVID, have mercy on me!" Son of David...(pause) Son of David? What does that mean? It's a bold claim and it's the first time in the Gospel of Mark it is used. The title comes from the promise that out of the line of David, Israel's greatest king, God would raise up another king whose kingdom would have no end. And Bartimaeus recognized what even the disciples struggled to see, that Jesus was the Son of David. He was the last person you would expect to do it, but he recognized Jesus.

A couple years ago, I was at a restaurant in Washington DC and as I walked to the table with my group, I passed by this guy (picture of Common). How many of you recognize him? This is the one and only, Lonnie Lynn, better known as Common. Emmy, Oscar, Grammy winning rapper, writer, actor. He's kind of a big deal. The rest of my group, in fact the whole restaurant continued on unaware of the greatness in our midst. And I proceeded to lose what little cool I have, and made a noise probably more like the demon possessed than Bartimaeus, and I kid you not, I said, "Common! Your portfolio! Such great work!" (pause) Now, let's get real. At face value, I don't look like someone who would be familiar with Common's portfolio. He seemed just as surprised (Picture of me and Common). But I couldn't believe I was the only person in the restaurant who recognized him, and I wouldn't pass up the opportunity to meet this artist I esteem.

Bartimaeus, wouldn't let the opportunity pass. He was persistent in his belief of who Jesus was. And he cried out, have mercy on me! Another way to say this would be "Jesus! King! Show me blessing I don't deserve!" I wonder if he was familiar with Isaiah 35:5 which says that when this Messiah sits on his throne: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped." I wonder if he was claiming that promise. I wonder if he recognized that this kingdom would be so much more than the political, military sovereignty most 1st century Jews expected it to be, if he sat by the roadside, hearing stories of the things that Jesus said and did and saw through his blindness

what those around him couldn't, that this kingdom would be one that brought healing, and wholeness, and hope to the oppressed.

But how do the people walking past react to his shouts? It says that many rebuked him. They told him to be silent. They hushed the loud cries of this man, cursed with blindness, undeserving of Jesus time or attention. In their opinion, Jesus couldn't be bothered with this roadside beggar, inappropriate in the commotion he was causing. So, they attempted to silence him. Thankfully, Bartimaeus didn't listen to the shushing of the crowd. He is persistent belief despite opposition.

But what does persistence of belief look like for us? What does it look like in light of our sermon series on healing? It looks having a faith that won't quit, that won't be silenced, that won't be distracted or deterred, even when things aren't going the way we hoped, even when it feels like Jesus isn't doing what we thought he would do. Even when we wait. Persistence of belief is the courage, the boldness to believe that Jesus is present, is leading, that he is for us.

Bartimaeus was persistent in his belief, he was also persistent in his petition. He kept crying out, louder and louder. And hearing the persistent cries of Bartimaeus, Jesus stopped. He stopped, in the middle of the road and told that same group of shushers to call Bartimaeus to him. Ever the wallflower, Bartimaeus is reserved in his response. He sprang up, he threw off his cloak and he ran right to Jesus. He doesn't hesitate, not for a second. He throws off the garment and all that might encumber. And he comes to Jesus, bare and bold, not heeding those who told him he shouldn't, not letting anything get in the way of being with Jesus.

We have a pool in our backyard, and I am always floored by how quickly kids go from our front door to cannonballs in the summer. Often, the route from the front door to the backyard is littered with shoes and shirts tossed aside. Nothing can get in the way, nothing can hold them back, their eyes are on the prize. When Jesus bids us come, our lives should look like my summertime living room, a wake of cast off hinderances and overcome obstacles as we rush to the feet of our savior, yearning for the relief, comfort and hope that only he can give.

And relief is coming for our friend Bartimaeus. Jesus asks what might seem like a silly question. He asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" But let's think about some of the possible answers. Bartimaeus was blind, but he understood Jesus to be a king. He could have asked for kingly things: money, power, fame, a new cloak. None of these answers would be farfetched. In the verses previous to our passage, Jesus asked the same question to his disciples James and John. "What do you want me to do for you?" They answered, "We want to sit on your right

hand and your left hand when you come to glory." Their request was temporal, power driven, self-glorifying. Jesus tells them it's not his to give, that it's not possible. But Bartimaeus is persistent in his prayer and asks Jesus do the impossible, the supernatural. He says, "Rabbi, let me recover my sight." Actually, he says, "Rabboni," meaning "my teacher". "My teacher, let me recover my sight." His request is specific and simple. It's not a long oration laced with big words and all the reasons why Jesus should heal him. Bartimaeus has the faith to approach Jesus this bold, specific prayer.

I would venture to say that most of us have a bold and specific prayer, you know that prayer that if you closed your eyes, and pictured Jesus standing before you asking you "What would you have me

do for you?" your answer to that question. Are we bold enough to pray those prayers? Persistence of petition is praying with specificity and audacity. It's the courage to believe that God has the power to answer prayer.

And then Jesus said to Bartimaeus, "Go! your loudness made you well." Or was it "Go! your hustle made you well." No! Because Bartimaeus wasn't healed because of his yelling. He wasn't saved by the number of times he asked. We have to be careful that we don't read this passage to mean the squeaky wheel gets the oil. This sermon is not titled, The Pesterer, as though if we asked enough times in the right way, and if we can just get God's attention...then we will be healed. No, it's called the Persistent. The healing of Bartimaeus was found in his faith. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that, Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Bartimaeus THE BLIND MAN had heard of what Jesus had done; he hadn't seen it. And he had faith that Jesus was the one who could give him the mercy he didn't deserve, that Jesus was the one that could make him whole. Go, your FAITH has made you well.

Bartimaeus walks away healed. But he doesn't walk away, does he? Because there is one more way that Bartimaeus is persistent, he is persistent in his commitment to follow Jesus. Bartimaeus is the only person healed by Jesus who is mentioned by name in all of the Gospels. It is thought that this is because he was known in the early church, I'm sure for his quiet and demure character. After he is healed, it says that he followed Jesus on the way. And what a moment to start following Jesus, what a moment to regain his sight. As he joins the throngs of Passover pilgrims with their Passover lambs, he is walking with THE Passover lamb, Jesus. Bartimaeus would witness, with previously blinded eyes, the crucifixion of Jesus. He would witness the resurrection of Jesus, the defeat of the grave. He would be an eyewitness that God is a God who saves. He would witness all these things because he was bold and persistent in his faith in Jesus. Persistence of faith says I will follow you Jesus no matter what, no matter where, no matter the distance. I will follow you!

Go, your faith has made you well. When I was asked to preach in this sermon series, I have to admit that I almost turned it down. You see, I am person who hasn't seen God heal. I mean, I have seen God heal other people, in real and miraculous ways. And I firmly believe that God does heal today, he does! I've seen him heal people physically. I have seen him heal people spiritually. But when I have prayed for healing, for myself, for my mom, for my daughter...I have not seen physical healing. And I didn't know if I could be the voice to talk about healing,

because I haven't experienced it. We often talk about how before we preach, God preaches to us first. And oh, is that ever true. Because I haven't experienced healing. And as I read and dug into this passage, I had to ask myself, Is my faith persistent? Do I pray the persistent, bold prayer born out of faith? I've realized during this sermon series that I am afraid to pray those bold specific prayers. They seem impossible. I give my prayers a lot of cushion to cover my doubt. I say things like "If it pleases you, O Lord." Or "If you won't heal this, then maybe heal this?" And when that little bit of boldness bubbles up, I rebuke myself. God can't be bothered with little old me. I know there are others who feel the same way, that healing is for someone else. The words that I kept coming back to over and over in this passage were "And Jesus stopped." Jesus stopped. Jesus isn't a God who can't be bothered. He stops and listens to the cries of his people. The persistence of faith is not found in the answered prayer, it's found in the one who answers the prayer, the eternal king, the Son of David, the God who saves, and who is currently sitting at the right hand of God the father. Hebrews 7:25

tells us that “Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession.” The God who came stops and listens to our prayers is right now, at this very moment, interceding for us, whispering our prayers to God the Father. Doesn’t that make you want to pray with boldness?