

“Shouts from the margins”  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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*Mark 10:46-52*

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It's not the very great, or the very powerful, whose stories are chosen by the Gospels. It's ordinary people like you and me. When all other literature recorded the deeds only of kings and philosophers, it was the Gospels that chose to hear from shepherds and widows, or a man blind and poor named Bartimaeus. He alone, of all the people Jesus heals in the Gospel of Mark, is given a name. He has a name because though the world would say he's not worth knowing, God insists that this is a man whose life matters. Today, Bartimaeus will speak for himself.

*Bartimaeus:* Shalom, and good morning! I realize you are Gentiles, so you may not know this, but my name is very special. It means “Son of Timaeus,” which means “honor” and “value.” So, really, my name is “Son of Honor.” It's something I'd always remind myself whenever people said mean things to me, or walked past me as if I didn't exist. In 1st century Palestine, being blind and poor meant you were an outcast. I wasn't allowed to enter the temple or make an offering. God didn't want anything to do with me, or so they said. Every day, I sat on that road out of Jericho, begging for help. Occasionally, someone threw a coin or a crust of bread my way, and that's how I survived. But I wanted more. I wanted someone to say my name, to love me. I wanted to belong. And when I heard Jesus was coming, I thought this was my chance. So I shouted out. The people around me told me to be quiet. They were always telling me to be quiet, to wait my turn. I'll let one of them tell you why.

*A righteous citizen:* Yeah, I was one of the crowd that day. We all knew this guy. He begged from us every day. He smelled. He was always interrupting us. And we just got tired of him. And yes, if I'm being honest, he reminded us of things we didn't want to think about: poverty, its unfairness, and how maybe we were a part of that. I tried to obey the Torah and be charitable, helping him out when I could. But that day, when he shouted out and started pushing through the crowd, we just lost it. We wanted to hear Jesus, not this guy. And so we yelled at him; we told him to sit down and be quiet. Some were pretty mean about it. Maybe they can explain.

*Another in the crowd:* Yeah, I told that guy to shut up. And I'm not sorry about it. He should have known his place, and it sure wasn't with us. Why should I care what he had to say?

At this moment—and this is Patrick talking now—there are people shouting for mercy and justice, for a chance to belong, and they are being silenced. Personally, I suspect that I have played all three roles, and maybe you have too. I've been the one silenced. I've been the person who means to do right, but some days, my comfort and agenda get in the way, and I end up putting them ahead of someone who needs me. And I bet there are a few times when I've been the guy who just didn't care. Usually it was because I was so wrapped up in my own hurt and anger that I just couldn't see anyone else.

There is someone today who stands with Bartimaeus on that roadside, shouting: see me.

It is every woman telling her story of assault and abuse, only to be silenced, blamed, shamed. It is every parent and child crossing thousands of dangerous miles to come here, on a hope and a prayer of refuge, only to be caged, separated, and turned away. It is every person with a disability asking for acceptance, only to be avoided, mocked, and shut out. It is every veteran silenced and denied support; every transgender person told they do not exist; every person of color told their lives matter less; every aging person treated like a child; every person whose irreducible humanity is erased, till they are nameless.

But Bartimaeus had a name. The Gospel insisted on that. So let's hear from Bartimaeus.

*Bartimaeus:* Yeah, they told me to be quiet. But I, Bartimaeus, Son of Honor, persisted and cried out even louder. And you know what? Jesus heard me. He called me forward. And then something completely unexpected happened: these same people who had just told me to be quiet, who had walked past me every day of my life, as if I was nothing, they spoke to me. They told me to take heart, took me by the arm, and led me to Jesus. And I knew he was my Savior when he did something no one had ever done before: he asked me what I needed. Can you believe it? He asked *me!* He asked me to speak, to tell him my story, my hurt, my dreams. And so I did. And I never went back to that roadside. I followed Jesus to kingdom come. I got a miracle that day, but it wasn't eyesight. The miracle was getting all those people to see *me*, to want me, to know my name. I'll let one of them talk to you now.

*A righteous citizen:* I couldn't believe it. Jesus wanted to see and hear the man we had shunned for years. And I've got to tell you: when I saw how Jesus looked at that man, when I saw how he listened and loved him, I felt like I had been blind all my life and for the first time I was seeing. Seeing with brand new eyes. With God eyes. I was seeing Bartimaeus, and he was beautiful. I saw someone that day who had a far deeper faith than I. I saw someone who could make me, and my world, better if I would but listen. I was changed that day. Sadly, not everyone was.

*Another in the crowd:* I couldn't believe it. Jesus was talking to that no-good beggar. Clearly, Jesus wasn't the man I thought he was. He was no rabbi, no savior, no God incarnate. No way would God chose that man over me. I swore to oppose Jesus from that time on, till he was swinging from a tree.

It's important that we hear the voice of this third man. It's important because we have to know that there are those who will plug their ears, shut their eyes, and deny the truth.

But the good news is that they couldn't stop Bartimaeus from shouting out even more loudly, and they couldn't stop Jesus from hearing him, and they sure couldn't stop Jesus from loving him. No cross, no tomb, could hold back that love. And because Jesus took the time to see Bartimaeus, he revealed to the world what it had been blind to for so long: a disciple, a love-bearing, world-changing, God-witnessing, valued son of God.

So, if you're someone who's been shut out, told you're no good, ignored and silenced, the Gospel has a message for you today: persist. Shout out even more loudly. Tell the world who you are. And God will hear. God will answer. God will proclaim to the world that your life matters. God will reveal just how valued you are.

And to the rest of us: take the time to see someone today, to listen to their story, to ask what they need. Let God wipe the scales from your eyes and reveal, not an enemy, not a bother, but a child of God wondrously made. If you take the time to look, to love, others will see you. Not everyone will change. But some will. Some, because of you, will look upon that same person with new eyes. With God's eyes. And then we will remember: we were the blind ones, and Christ came to give sight to the blind. **Amen.**