

What Can Jesus Do For You?

Mark 10: 46-52

October 15, 2000

Dr. J. Howard Olds

He sat alone beside the highway begging,
His eyes were blind, the light he could not see,
He clutched his rags and shivered in the darkness,
Then Jesus came and made his darkness flee.

There is a question in this biblical encounter of a divine kind that cuts across culture and transcends time. Jesus says to the blind beggar, "Bartimaeus, what do you want me to do for you?" It's a simple question really. Walk into any Brentwood fast food restaurant and I've made all of them in the last week or two and a host of people will immediately say to you, "May I help you?" Call this church and one of our kind receptionists will say, "This is Brentwood United Methodist Church, how may I help you?" Lily Tomlin who used to play Edith Ann says, "When I feel that nobody cares, I go down to Sears and I tell them that I'm lost and they call out my name on the loud speaker. They like me down at Sears, even though I buy my clothes at J. C. Penney. And that's the truth!"

A common question, an ordinary question, a question posed a thousand ways on thousands of days by ordinary people in the course of life. Then a truth dawns on me. It is Jesus Christ who is asking this question. The Lord of all history, the Lover of all people, the Light of the world, the Source of all life, dares to ask a bystander in the crowd and you in the pew, "What may I do for you?" "What would you like Me to do for you?" And it is here that I want to land today.

Now let me be perfectly honest and completely clear. There are some things that Jesus will not do for you. For example, Jesus will

not always **please you** and make you happy. A Sunday School teacher asked her elementary students, "Is there anything that Jesus can't do?" – without hesitation Mark replied, "My daddy says Jesus Christ Himself can't make my sister happy." And of course Mark is right. Jesus is not a genie in a bottle. I can't rub my religion just right assuming that Jesus will give me everything that I might want or hope for.

I was happy to discover that Tennessee has no lottery. Before you run off to Kentucky to buy your lottery ticket, I need to help you understand that God is not going to help you win the lottery. Week after week, when I was a pastor in Louisville, people would come up to me and ask me if I would pray that they would win the lottery this week; if I would pray over their ticket. "If I win," they would say to me, "I'll give 10 percent to the church." Now about this time of year, with budgets to raise and ministries to fund, I confess to you there were moments that it got tempting to do it but I need to tell you that God is not your good luck charm. Jesus will not always please you.

Jesus will not always **promote you**. There is an interesting correlation between this story and the story that immediately proceeds it in the gospel lesson. You see, Jesus pulls his disciples for a strategy session, change is in the air and James and John ask for a special privilege in a private meeting. Jesus says to them the exact same question, "What would you like Me to do for you?" They said to him, "Let one of us sit on your right hand and the other on your left hand in Your glory." To which Jesus responds, "You don't what you're asking. To sit on my right or my left is not for me grant," and I need to say that's true even in our day. God will not necessarily give you a promotion today.

After 30 years in the ministry including five moves and one episcopal nomination, I'm certain of this. God does not always give us what we want; God only places us where we're needed. That makes all the difference. Jesus will not always promote you.

Jesus will not always **protect you**. It was the middle of the night. I made my way to the home of a parishioner whose wife had died. I stepped into his living room and there he was on his knees. I knelt beside him to try to comfort him in the midst of his loss. He looked at me, a prominent man in that community through his tear-stained face and said to me, "This was not supposed to happen. God and I had a deal before I left the hospital and my wife was not supposed to have died." Now I need to tell you, that the middle of the night, on your knees in somebody's living room, is a terrible place to teach theology. But that night I had to help that businessman understand that God doesn't cut bargains like that. There's some things that Jesus will not do for you.

Never a morning wore to evening but some heart breaks, a heart just as sensitive as yours or mine. I like what Ziggy says in a Tom Wilson cartoon. Every time I ask, "Why me?," another voice down deep inside of me asks, "Exactly who else did you have in mind for this moment of trouble?" Bartimaeus could have discussed suffering and wrestled with the theology of pain; instead he asked for help. What can Jesus do for you?

While there are some things that Jesus will not do, what He's done for others, He'll do for you. Here in verse 47 of this story in Mark's gospel, this beggar on the road by the name of Bartimaeus says, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The crowd tries to quiet him, they say to him, "Don't be making such a fuss with this prominent person passing by" and he says even louder and even more profound, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." And that is precisely what Jesus Christ wants to do for us. He does have mercy on the working man and the professional woman, the struggling student and the frustrated child here today.

The quality of mercy is not strained, it drops like gentle rain from heaven upon the earth beneath. "It is twice blessed," said Shakespeare. It blesses him that gives and him that takes. Mercy - what a beautiful word in the Bible. *Hesed*, the Hebrews called it. The mercy of the Lord endures forever or as we say in that favorite

of all Psalms, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life so that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Kyrie Eleison -- Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy. Was there ever a better prayer written in history than that appeal for God to have mercy on His people?

She was a brilliant high school student. She made straight A's. Her family was proud of her. Somewhere around age 17, she got mixed up in the wrong crowd and began to do drugs and promiscuous sex. She soon got out of high school and immediately went to the furthest college away from home so that she wouldn't be under the supervision of her caring parents. College was harder than high school and she almost immediately flunked out. Too proud to come home, Mary fell deeper into the world of drugs and promiscuous sex. Her parents only heard from her when she wanted money and when they stopped sending her money, they didn't hear from her at all. Then one day Mary woke up in the apartment of a man that she did not know but there she came to her senses. She left that apartment and called home. She asked if her parents would take her in and of course they did. They sent her a ticket and she found her way home and when she got home, Mary said there are two things I need to do immediately. I need to take a long, hot bath and I need to go to church.

Her parents were not regular church attenders but the following Sunday, they were in church sitting in the pew before time for service to begin but that particular Sunday worship was a lot about program and not much about peace and prayer. The preacher said a lot about service but not much about salvation. While Mary and her family did not know exactly why they were there, they knew that they did not get what they were looking for when they left. Her daddy said to Mary, "Don't worry about it, I'll find you a great counselor." To which Mary said, "I'll be glad to see a counselor but I still need to find a church. I need God to tell me that what I did was wrong but I'm still lovable. I need to know that from the Divine One that while I really messed up, I'm not a bad person, I

need God to take my sin seriously but to love me unconditionally. I need to find a church for that.”

That is what mercy does. Mercy is not magic. It does not cure all our cancers; it does not transform all our kids into winners or send us soaring into the high skies of success. Rather mercy helps us look reality in the face and know our sins are completely and totally forgiven. Mercy is that dynamic movement of unconditional love from God that sets us free to become what we were created to be, that's what mercy does.

“Oh, Son of David, have mercy on me,” and Jesus wants to do that for you and for me. Notice what else Bartimaeus asks for. Verse 51 says, “Rabbi, I want to see.” Most beggars ask for money but Bartimaeus asked for vision. “I want to see.” “Without a vision, the people perish,” said the writer of Proverbs.

A vision is a picture of a preferred future. It is interesting that Bartimaeus had vision before he had eyesight; do you get that? He had vision long before he had eyesight. Stephen Covey says we a choice concerning the circumstances of our life. We can a victim or a visionary. We can wander through life lamenting the way things are or we can image a new course of action and pursue it conscientiously. Open our eyes, Lord, we need to see a picture of our preferred future. A vision is a gift more than an accomplishment. Visions come through patience and prayer more than power and control. Visions are not developed, they are revealed. They come to people who created space enough to watch and to wait and to listen.

I ran across this question the other day. Am I missing the burning bush of God's revelation in my effort to keep the lawn mowed? Have I created the space of time in my busy life to hear from God?

A vision is costly and transformational. Do you ever think that Bartimaeus life was going to be radically different from this day forward? He couldn't go on doing the same old thing. He was

going to have to get a job. He couldn't make a living anymore begging on the side of the road. He was going to have to change his relationship. Everything was going to be radically changed and he was to have to spend the rest of his life telling the wonderful story about how he met somebody on a road one day that dramatically transformed the course of his life. Are you willing to change like that? A vision. A vision calls for radical transformation of life. No wonder we're scared of it from time to time.

Finally, visions for Christians at least, are always associated with the living Christ. Do you ever wonder when the blurred eyes of Bartimaeus began to focus and the blobs of color and light began to come together, the first face that Bartimaeus sees is the face of Jesus Christ Himself. When the healed eyes of Bartimaeus catch the kind eyes of Jesus, it was love at first sight.

Day by day, I try to pray, "Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus, to reach out and touch Him and say that I love Him; open my ears, Lord, and help me to listen; open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus." Would you dare to pray that prayer with me?