

Bartimaeus and the Broken Hearts

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. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 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." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 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." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Mark 10:46-52

Well, good morning to you, Good Shepherd. I am very excited and honored to have the opportunity to be here with y'all this morning. I've had the chance to meet some of y'all but before I get started, I want to go ahead and introduce myself.

My name is Gavin Tomlin and I am currently in my second year at Virginia Theological Seminary over in Alexandria and I am going to be your Seminarian here for the next two years. I'm originally from around here, I grew up about 25 miles west of here, down 66, in Gainesville, and after college down in Central Virginia, I moved out to Texas where I found the Episcopal Church. It was in Texas that I felt the calling to the ordination and went through the whole discernment process, and after all that, the Bishop out there decided to send me back to Virginia for school!

I already feel incredibly welcomed here, for which I am grateful, Good Shepherd is a very easy place to be, and I am looking forward to getting to know even more of y'all over the next few years that I'm here.

So, would y'all pray with me?

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love. Come to us and we shall be made and you will renew the face of the earth. Amen.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus and the Disciples are ultimately on their way to Jerusalem. Coming up from the south, they go off out their way, some thirty-odd miles out of their way, to stop in Jericho for who knows how long, because the text doesn't say. What it does say is that when they were done there, finished running errands, and preparing for a

long walk back south to the gates of Jerusalem, they were waylaid at the city gates of Jericho, by the shouts of a blind beggar. His name was Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus is blind. He hasn't always been that way, but he's blind now and he hears, maybe from the murmurs of the crowd or the words from the not-as-quiet-as-they-think-they-are folks, that Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher, the healer, is among them. He's there, and he's walking by. But, Jesus isn't teaching and he's not healing, he's just trying to get out of town. Bartimaeus cries out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And, apparently, Jesus doesn't hear him, but the people around him, the murmurers and the loud-talkers, the embarrassed-of-their-blind-beggar-lying in the street, tell him to be quiet. "Not now! He's busy — let him get on with his day."

But Bartimaeus doesn't care. What does he have to lose? He's in the street, blind, begging, wearing nothing but a cloak and he's shouting, trying to be heard over the din of the crowd, not for power, or campaign donations, or for anyone to buy his wares, but simply to be heard. He's crying out for mercy. For consideration. And he shouts again, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And what does Jesus do? He stops. In the middle of the crowd, Jesus stops, people bumping into him, the disciples looking back and seeing that they've once again lost track Jesus and see him standing near the blind beggar who is repeatedly shouting for mercy, and the people around him embarrassedly telling him to just. shut. up.

Jesus stops and says, "call him here." That's all: "Call him. Here." And the people who were, moments before, telling the poor, sightless, Bartimaeus to leave Jesus alone and just let him walk away, are suddenly saying, "Listen! He's talking to you, get up! Don't embarrass yourself, get up and walk over there." And Bartimaeus does just that, but not before he throws off his cloak. Now, this man is blind beggar who has been sitting on the roadside for, truly, God-only-knows-how-long, and it is likely that this cloak is the only piece of clothing that he owns.

This is our picture now: a crowded street, a city gate, people coming in and out, no time to stop and have a conversation, barely any way to hear a shout over the cacophony of human voices, and Jesus has stopped, called to a man, a man who is the embarrassment of the neighborhood, likely a naked man, at least an uncovered man, coming toward Jesus, who he cannot see at all, but can only hear. He stumbles up to Jesus, maybe falling forward toward Jesus, and pitching backward, trying to maintain some balance, but not to maintain a single shred of dignity, because Bartimaeus is a man with nothing to lose. He's standing before Jesus, begging for mercy, uncovered, vulnerable. And Jesus, has the audacity to ask this man, who is just as uncovered spiritually as he is physically, "what do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus, answers, with an implied, “well, obviously,” “Rabbi, teacher, let me recover my sight.” Let me be like I used to be, let me see again. And Jesus says, “Go. Your faith has made you well.” Immediately Bartimaeus regains his sight and follows Jesus out of the city. The actual word Jesus uses there, in saying that Bartimaeus has been made well, has a connotation of, “*safe*” or “*whole*.” So, Bartimaeus’ faith has made him safe or whole.

This is a story about God’s power, yes, and amen. God’s power to make us whole. But this story is about the faithfulness of a person at the end of their rope, with nowhere else to turn, no dignity left, no fear of embarrassment, who calls out to the God who has always been faithful, and finds that same God faithful again.

But this story is also about Broken Hearts, and how the owners of these broken hearts choose to respond with them. Because here’s the thing that I realized when I was studying this passage: Living a life at all will break your heart. Going through this life, seeing pain and suffering, experiencing pain and suffering, on whatever scale, will break your heart. That’s part of what it means to live a life: to experience pain. To have your heart broken.

At this point in the Gospel Narrative, Jesus has not yet gone to the cross, but that doesn’t mean his heart hasn’t been broken. He’s spent the last 10 chapters of Mark, teaching, healing, restoring, spending time in and with the brokenness of the world and, in turn, having his heart broken. He’s seen death, decay, sickness, suffering, all of it, and he hasn’t made himself immune to it, or ignored it, he’s allowed it to break his heart, and we can see that in how he responds to Bartimaeus.

When Jesus hears the cries for mercy from the blind beggar, he stops. He doesn’t ignore him, he doesn’t shout him down, he stops and calls him over, and he allows his heart to be broken open, outward to the one who needs it. But, the crowd around Bartimaeus, who’s response stands in sharp to contrast to Jesus’, are also in possession of broken hearts. They’ve lived lives, they’ve experienced the loss of loved ones, of disappointments, of crushing loneliness, they’ve been human as well, and to be human for long enough means to have your heart broken.

And the difference in the response of the crowd and the response of Jesus doesn’t have to do with the breaking of their hearts, but with what they do with those hearts that have already been broken. The crowd has taken their broken hearts and allowed them to be broken inward, to become sort of calcified, ossified, and jaded. They’ve experienced pain and they’ve experienced loss and that’s just part of it, so move on! Don’t complain, don’t bother anyone, just play the hand you’re dealt and that is that.

But Jesus' heart is broken open, outward. He sees Bartimaeus, hears Bartimaeus and he stops. And he heals him. He allows the broken heart that he has, the one that comes with just being a human and living a life, to be broken outward, generously giving the compassion that comes from experiencing heartbreak.

Now I am sure that at this point, you see where I'm going with this... as this is stewardship season... and as I've really hit the theme hard in the last few minutes... and you are right. Sure, this is about money, of course this is about money; this is about seeing a need and filling a need.

But that ain't the whole bit!

Deciding—and it is a decision, an active one—to let our hearts be broken open and not inward, is a decision to be compassionate and be generous, yes with our money, and also with our very lives. This word, “*compassion*” means to “*suffer with*” or “*suffer alongside*.” And Jesus, after healing our blind beggar, took him with him to where He and the disciples were going next. They were going to Jerusalem. To the place where Jesus would be betrayed, tried by an unrighteous court, and executed.

The thing is, deciding to let our hearts break open is not a one-time thing, it is something that requires us to follow the way of Jesus. Even if following that way of Jesus will cause our hearts to be broken even wider, because ultimately, it's a decision that's worth it. To follow Jesus means to have compassion on those who need it, to have generosity for those who need it, to participate in the building of a world that Jesus died to save, because he loved, and still loves, that world, this world. And in this new world that broken hearts are building, there will be no more pain and no more suffering, no more tears, no more blindness, no more lack.

And here in our time, what we do with our broken hearts, choosing to let them break open toward those in need, asking “what do *you* want *me* to do for *you*?” and then doing that, witnesses to and points toward that new creation, where all things, truly, *all things* will be made new.

Amen.
