

## **On the Way**

*Sermon preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast*

*Olentangy Church*

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### **Mark 10:46-52**

*Closer and closer they came to Jerusalem. There Jesus would declare himself by what he would say and do and by how he would die. On the way to Jerusalem was Jericho.*

They entered Jericho. Then, as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a big crowd, Bartimaeus – Timaeus' son, that is – a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadway. When he heard that it was Jesus from Nazareth, he started to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!" Lots of people scolded him so that he would be quiet. But he shouted even more, "Son of David, show me mercy!" Jesus stood there and said, "Call him here." So they called the blind man, "Take heart. Get up. He's calling you." And he threw his cloak aside, jumped up, and went to Jesus. Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "Teacher, make it so I can see again." Then Jesus said to him, "Go. Your faith has made you better." And just like that he could see again. Then he followed him on the way.

### **Children's Story**

Sammy the Squirrel fell out of a tree. He broke his leg. The doctor put his leg in a cast. The cast had to stay on for six weeks.

So for six weeks, Sammy walked with a strange limp. And for six weeks, he couldn't climb higher than the lowest branches of any tree.

For six weeks, six entire weeks, Sammy didn't feel like much of a squirrel. Squirrels are all about walking and hopping and running and climbing, and Sammy could hardly do any of it. His three-legged hop made his friends laugh. Sammy laughed, too. It was either that or cry.

At the end of six weeks, Sammy went back to the doctor and off came the cast! All of a sudden, Sammy could walk again and hop again and run again and climb again. Sort of.

Sammy's leg was better. The broken bone was mended. But his leg wasn't strong any more. So, for a while, Sammy still walked with a strange limp, not as strange as before, but strange enough in its own way. And, for a while, Sammy had to be extra careful about climbing. The last thing he wanted to do was to fall out of another tree and break another leg!

But he was not about to stay still. He was not about to stay on the ground. Sammy was a squirrel, and there was only one way to be a squirrel. Squirrels are all about walking and hopping and running and climbing. And that's just what Sammy did, did as best as he could.

I wonder what it's all about to be a person. To be a girl. To be a boy. And I wonder if we have a limp when we are trying our best to be who we are, to be who God made us to be. I wonder.

### **Sermon**

**They went through Jericho like it was a NASCAR pit stop.** That suited the crowd just fine. They weren't in the mood for wasting time, certainly not in Jericho. Jericho was not the point. In a sense, Jericho was beside the point. It just happened to be along the way. The point was Jerusalem. Every eye in the crowd was fixed in that direction.

By this time, a motley collection of people had coalesced around Jesus. There were apostles and disciples, of course, but also well-wishers and the curious and no doubt more than a few thrill-seekers. It's no wonder really. Jesus was a charismatic person. Jesus was the obvious center of an unfolding drama, a drama that was unfolding in the direction of Jerusalem.

And so they were impatient for Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the lines would be drawn. In Jerusalem recent events would play themselves out. And from Jerusalem there would be no turning back. Jerusalem was the point. That's why they were happy to hurry through Jericho. And that's why they were unhappy to hear a voice from the side of the roadway. The last thing they wanted was for Jesus to stop and investigate. So they

tried to shut the guy up. Whatever he had on his mind could only be a distraction. The point, after all, was Jerusalem.

**But the man, the blind man sitting by the roadway, brought the procession to a halt.** To that point it had been a typical Jericho day. The sun was out, and the air was warm. Traffic in and out of the city, mostly on foot, occasionally by donkey – traffic in and out of the city followed its usual rhythms. And, keeping to his own rhythm, Bartimaeus had taken his usual station. He was sitting by the roadway. His cloak was spread out on the ground beside him. And he was begging for money from the passersby. Whether they were going into the city or coming out of it, he called out to them. Every now and again, one of them would toss a coin onto Bartimaeus' outspread cloak. It was an act of mercy to help a blind man, pleasing to the God who sees everything.

But now the foot traffic increased. A crowd was coming out of the city, heading toward Jerusalem. With his sharp ears, Bartimaeus heard one name passing from person to person in that crowd: Jesus from Nazareth. Jesus from Nazareth. Bartimaeus knew that name. He had heard the stories: demons thrown out, lepers made clean, paralytics made to walk, a dead girl restored to life, thousands fed in the wilderness, the deaf and the blind made whole! He had heard the stories, stories that could mean only one thing. So on that sunny Jericho day, Bartimaeus shouted out to Jesus, "Jesus, son of David, show me mercy!" The crowd tried to shut him up, but Bartimaeus wouldn't listen. This was his only chance. And with Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, this was his last chance. So Bartimaeus shouted even more, "Son of David, show me mercy!" And Jesus stopped.

**Jesus stopped and turned his attention to the voice that was coming from alongside the roadway.** It was exactly what the crowd had feared. It didn't matter what he was doing, Jesus always took time for people. On his way to a dying girl, he stopped to help a troubled woman. In the thick of grown-up responsibilities, he took time out to welcome little kids. And now, seventeen miles from Jerusalem, less than a day's walk, Jesus stops!

Why? Why did Jesus stop? Sure Jesus is compassionate, a healer of the blind and the deaf and the lame. But did he even know who was doing the shouting? Did he know the man's condition or his complaint? Perhaps. But perhaps not. I think what arrested Jesus was what the man said and his fervor in saying it.

The man simply would not shut up. You know how that one person in a crowd sometimes won't shut up? He has the most annoying voice in a stadium filled with 100,000 people and he's sitting two rows behind you and he's all you can hear and he's oblivious to every hint and every dirty look. That man was sitting by the roadway outside Jericho. Who could ignore him?

But it was what he said more than anything. "Jesus, son of David, show me mercy!" Unlike nearly everyone else, including those clueless disciples, this man had an idea of who Jesus was, an idea of what he was about and of what he could do and would do. Jesus was the king, the messianic king, the one through whom God would show mercy to Israel. So the man shouted out to Jesus. Then Jesus stopped and had the man come to him.

Bartimaeus wasted no time. He tossed his cloak, his beggar's blanket, aside – I wonder how many coins went flying when he did that – jumped up, and, as quickly as a blind man could, made his way to Jesus. A conversation followed, with this end result: "Blind Bartimaeus" became "Just Plain Bartimaeus." And with his restored sight, he saw fit to follow Jesus on the way, on the way to Jerusalem.

**Big changes happened for Bartimaeus that day.** I want to focus on two things: first, what Bartimaeus asked for; second, what he did.

First, what Bartimaeus asked for. Jesus put the question to him: "What do you want me to do for you?" That's an important question. The answer is not always obvious, not the best answer anyway. We may think the answer was obvious for Bartimaeus, but that's not necessarily so. In any case, it's an important question for Bartimaeus to consider. Actually it's an important question for any one of us to consider.

Given the choice, what would we ask Jesus, what one thing would we ask Jesus to do for us? What one thing is worthy of his attention? What one thing is worthy of his action? What one thing do we need most, one thing that only Jesus can give? That's an important question for you and for me. It's an important

question for a church to consider also. What one thing do we need as a church, one thing that only Jesus can give?

Bartimaeus' answer was obvious, wasn't it though? "Make it so I can see again." What else would a blind man ask for? But his answer has more to it than that. It's an answer not just for Bartimaeus, but also for Jesus. "Jesus," Bartimaeus says in effect, "show yourself as Messiah. Make me a sign of your kingdom." The deaf hear, the lame walk, the blind see – those are signs of the Messiah's kingdom. The answer Bartimaeus gives serves the glory of Jesus. With that in mind, how would you answer Jesus, how would we answer Jesus, when he asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The second thing is what Bartimaeus did. He can see again, all of a sudden he can see. So what does he do? Does he go and find his three best friends and tell them about it? Does he run to tell his mother? Does he go to his doctor and say,

"Hey, Doc?"

"Yes."

"Hey, Doc?"

"What do you want?"

"Doc, do you like apples?"

"What?"

"I said, 'Do you like apples?'"

"Yes, I suppose."

"Well, no thanks to you I can see again. How do you like them apples?"

Bartimaeus didn't do any of those things. Instead he followed Jesus.

He had been waiting alongside the roadway, when along came the One who is the way, and he left to follow him on the way, on the way to Jerusalem. With faith in Jesus as the Messiah, Bartimaeus asked for a sign of the kingdom. When he received that sign, he left whatever way he had been on for Jesus' way instead.

That's the next question for us, isn't it, the question for each one of us and for this church? Are we on the way with Jesus, on the way? Or are we just alongside the way – within earshot perhaps, close enough for some of the sights and sounds of the kingdom, but not really there – either because we haven't asked Jesus for what matters most or because we haven't tossed our beggar's blanket aside, haven't tossed aside whatever it is that we think is our way to life?

Are we on the way with Jesus, on the way toward Jerusalem and everything that means? Are we on the way with Jesus, or are we just alongside the roadway? I wonder.