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## *You Need Mercy to Give Mercy*

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The Reverend Canon Beth Knowlton  
The Cathedral of St. Philip: 11:15  
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Proper 24B: Mark 10:46-52

Her name was Amy. I had been visiting her at Fountainview, a facility that cares for those with Alzheimer's for a number of months. My visits with her varied a great deal. Sometimes, she was particularly lucid, other times were more challenging. Sometimes she knew me, often she did not. But, whether she was having a good day or a bad day, we always shared communion and she always knew the words to the Lord's Prayer.

One afternoon remains with me, even fifteen years later. I entered one of the atrium areas and sat down next to Amy. She greeted me without recognition. She said, "Are you waiting for the ferry too this morning?" As she spoke, you had the sense that at some point in her life, she spent a good deal of time waiting for a boat to carry her towards her work and then back home again. On that day, we were back in that space, waiting for the ferry that would take us to our next destination.

As we sat waiting, we listened together to the many conversations around us. There was the medical conversation that involved the nurses. Had Harry gotten his medicine on time? Was Judy ready for lunch in the dining room? Occasionally, a resident would ask where they were. "You are in Atlanta, Joe. Your son will be here later to see you." Redirected, he would be on his way again.

It was not long after sitting down that, another woman who lived at the facility began to cry out. "Mercy! Help me! Help me! I need help! Have mercy. Why won't anyone come and help me?"

It was an uncomfortable moment. It was a sad moment. The nurses scurried over and began to try and quiet her. She became more agitated and continued to scream out for help. Other residents began to get agitated as well. Internally I felt the same. We all just wanted it to be over. Eventually, the staff removed her from the gathering area, to her room. We could all hear her cries fading into the distance as she was taken away.

"Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. As he and his disciple 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."

Bartimaeus is someone at the margins. He's not the person we pick to sit next to in the waiting room. He's a little rough around the edges and not likely to be part of the city council or head of the welcome wagon. He agitates those of us in the crowd. Some of us in the crowd become annoyed, embarrassed, and ready to move on as quickly as possible when we encounter our Bartimaeus'. We might veer around a corner or take another stairway, just to minimize our chances of having to see him.

Like someone at the cocktail party who speaks a bit too loudly and off topic, the cordial discourse has just shifted to awkwardness and discomfort. We look for help in the crowd, who will remove us or him from this place?

I wonder how those new to the crowd in Jericho felt. Were they hoping someone would just grab the guy and move him

off the scene? You can see someone complaining. "Why didn't we take the other exit out of town? You know he's always here." Some had compassion. "Poor Bartimaeus. He's having one of his bad days. I hope he doesn't think this Jesus is going to be able to change his life. He'll only be disappointed again."

But amongst all the conversations, I wonder. Did anyone say, "Wow, he's right. I need mercy too. I should be shouting as loud as he is!" I suspect not.

We are often taught about extending mercy, but I wonder if we can ever genuinely extend it to one another if we have not experienced our own need for it. If we haven't experience our own deep need for healing, how can we possibly hear the cries of another without becoming agitated, uncomfortable, and take on the role of the silencers in the crowd.

As a child I did not grow up experiencing mercy. Not because my parents were merciless. Quite the contrary. I was raised me amongst the Quakers who knew what it was to enact justice, mercy and kindness to all. It was because I grew up in a stable loving home that focused on predictability and good boundaries, that I missed out on my own need for mercy. I knew what the rules were. What the consequences were, and I could take that to the bank. It was a gift.

But I wasn't prepared for the occasions when the rules simply didn't apply anymore. The times when a loving response could shift the way I saw the world.

When I was in my early twenties I was what you might consider a super volunteer at my home church. I served on the vestry, sang in the choir, taught Sunday School, and even led the youth group. I took my responsibilities very seriously and loved the community I had found here in Atlanta. I was at the church more than I was not. I remember thinking I was driving to work one morning and startling myself into awareness when I pulled into the St. Bede's parking lot instead.

But then something changed. I met someone. I fell in love. And he lived in all places, Kennesaw. We were married and while I didn't want to leave my parish, I simply couldn't be there as often as before. I decided to go talk to my priest. To share with him how I was feeling overwhelmed and over-obligated. I had not expectation of being released from my responsibilities, I just hoped he would have some good time management advice. When I described what I was feeling, he said, "Well, why don't you just resign from the vestry. We can have someone fill the rest of your term. I hate to lose you, but there is no reason not to acknowledge that your world view has changed." A burden I didn't even know I had been carrying fell away from my shoulders.

"Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here."

The crowd is perplexed. This was not the response they expected from the teacher. They move from silencing the beggar to encouraging him to respond. And Bartimaeus, who knew his need for mercy long before, springs up and vaults himself towards Jesus. What will he ask for? What will the teacher do? The crowd is riveted.

"Let me see again."

Yes, again.

He is immediately healed and Jesus proclaims his faith to him and to the crowd. And, he follows Jesus on the way. All the way to Jerusalem. All the way to the cross. Ultimately to Resurrection. But, it is not an easy road. Bartimeaus has not been healed to enter into a life that is any easier that the one he had on the margins crying out for help. But it is a life of faith and a life of wellness.

We are all Bartimaeus. We are all the crowd. We are all blind and in need of healing. We lose sight, we regain it. It is the way of Jesus.

That afternoon at Fountainview, as the cries of the woman screaming for mercy faded into the distance, we of the crowd sat back. There was no miracle healing and discomfort only gradually yielded to relief. A crisis had been averted. We did not have to listen to someone cry out for mercy when there was none for us to give. My attention shifted back to Amy.

I don't know what I expected, but the placid expression that was there was a surprise. She had been engaged in what had just happened, but there had been no fear, no agitation. She looked at me and said, "You know it's funny, all of us sitting here just waiting for the ferry. We don't really know one another. But on the other hand, we also know that if one of us

needs help, we can all pull together. We can get beyond that to be with one another. Our cries are always heard."

Amen

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