
Cry Out, Take Heart, and Transform the World

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A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler

Proper 25B

Mark 10:46-52

*When Bartimaeus 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!" (Mark 10:47-48)*

It's one of the first things we do in life. We cry out. I don't quite remember doing it myself; but I sure remember my little brother, born seven years after me, crying out. I remember my own children, as infants, crying out, in the middle of the night. Yes, and during the day, too. Now, I hear my daughter's new baby, crying out. It's one of the first things we do as human beings.

And as surely as we cry out, there is someone there trying to calm us. "There, there; it's alright." "Here's something to eat, something to drink." "Here's a new diaper." "Here is someone to touch you." "Here is someone to make it better."

As we grow older, the people around us don't really try to calm us. They try to shut us up. "Be quiet," we hear. "Can't you see I'm trying to concentrate here?" "Honey, shut the children up; they are really disturbing tonight."

Then, we become adults. Sometimes when we cry out as adults, we are merely being our whiny childish selves. Sometimes, we are simply complaining. But, for many of us, our crying out is not a matter of selfish comfort at all. Some of us learn to cry out for legitimately good reason. There are needs, legitimate needs, in the world. If the people around us are not paying attention, we need to cry out!

Wherever critical popular movements have emerged in our human civilizations, they have emerged because someone cried out. Martin Luther King, Jr., had the courage to cry out. The people of Syria, at this very moment, are crying out. I was proud of my daughter, Sarah, who helped organize a health vigil last Wednesday night at the State Capital, crying out on behalf of people who have died because of lack of medical insurance.

None of us likes to be disturbed. And none of us like complaining. But, crying out can be a good thing. In fact, in the Bible, crying out can be a sign of healthy faith. The most faithful people in the Bible cry out. Moses cries out on behalf of his people. King David cries out in the psalms. The prophets cry out. John the Baptist is a voice crying out in the wilderness.

Our Old Testament lesson this morning was another passage from Job. Who can forget Job? That book can be summarized as forty-two chapters of this kind of thing. First Job crying out, and then his so-called friends trying to comfort him. Over and over again, and the crying out is painful. But in his suffering, and in his pain, and in his crying out, Job is one of the

most faithful characters in the Bible.

The New Testament version of Job, is none other than our Lord, Jesus Christ, who suffers innocently, and who also cries out.

The great heroes of faith cry out. But, most of us are not great heroes of the faith. For most of us, it is hard to tell whether we are crying out for good reason, or whether we are merely whining - complaining. Most of us are like Bartimaeus, the hero of our gospel passage for today; people didn't know whether he was merely complaining, or whether he was legitimately crying out.

Bartimaeus was the poor blind soul sitting along the way while Jesus walks by, while everyone else seems to be having a good time. Jesus is teaching. The disciples are (supposedly) learning. "It's a wonderful day in the neighborhood," and all seems to be well.

But Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, is upsetting the crowd. He keeps interrupting with his illness. We all know such people. We have all heard them. The church seems to be getting along comfortably. Or maybe it's our school. Or the business, the organization, the city, the country, is purring along like a fine-tuned motor. But there is one person who is totally blind to it all. He is in the corner, poor and complaining.

And, frankly, his complaining gets on our nerves. Blind Bartimaeus sure got on the nerves of Jesus' disciples. It is Jesus' disciples who tell the poor man to be quiet! But Bartimaeus cries out even more loudly. Then, Jesus stops. Jesus says, "Call him here."

Something happens when Jesus says that. Suddenly, the attitude of the disciples changes! They had been saying, "Shut up, shut up. Be quiet." But something happens when Jesus stops for blind Bartimaeus.

When Jesus stops to recognize the blind man, the beggar man, the complaining man, the disciples stop complaining, too! In fact, they are transformed. Their attitude changes completely, and they say to the guy, "Hey, get up, take heart. He is calling you."

And the man does get up. He does more than get up. He jumps up! He throws off his cloak. He runs to Jesus.

Right then! Right then, they become a healthy community.

The healthy organization, the healthy church, the healthy community of whatever sort, has the courage to throw off the old. It has the courage to throw away complaint and powerlessness. One of the things Jesus says to all of us today is, "Throw off being a wimp! Stop whining! Get up!"

It is not just Bartimaeus who is healed and renewed in this story. The disciples, too, are renewed! It is the entire community who becomes healthy and renewed. Listen to what the disciples say: "Take heart, get up. He is calling you." They cross over to Bartimaeus's side!

"Take heart, get up!" These might be the most important words in the story today. Take a look at the other places in the gospel where that phrase is used, "Take heart. Be of good cheer" (they are the same word in Greek). Every other time the phrase is used, it is uttered by Jesus himself. (Matthew 9:2, 9:22, 14:27, John 16:33).

"Take heart," are the words Jesus uses to build up faith, to build up his church, and to build up the world. The world, with all our serious problems, needs those words from Jesus. But, even more, the world needs Jesus' disciples to use those words. Here, in this story of Bartimaeus, Jesus's disciples themselves actually use the words. They truly become church. They become a transformative community.

Part of this story, then, is about the disciples becoming a healthy church, learning how to hear someone who has been crying out. It is the disciples who learn how to assist those in need, not to dismiss the needy as simply another group of complainers.

However, there is also another part of the story.

"Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

It's one thing to ask that. It is a deep and common prayer. But when one sits there, day in and day out, complaining the prayer instead of believing the prayer, then it becomes an attitude, a habit of complaint. It becomes a culture of complaint. Bartimaeus was accustomed merely to sit by the road and complain. And everybody else was accustomed to it, too. He would complain, and everyone else would tell him to be quiet. So went the world. It was a culture of complaint.

Until Jesus showed up. Jesus said, "Call him here." The crowd called the blind man, the man jumped up, threw off his cloak; and in that moment, the cycle of disease was broken. Jesus interfered with the status quo. Jesus broke the culture of complaint and introduced a culture of generosity.

Jesus is generous in the most direct way possible: "What do you want me to do for you?" To the crowd, Jesus' question must have seemed oddly unnecessary. Why couldn't Jesus understand already what the man needed? Everybody else in town knew.

Well, Jesus needs Bartimaeus to declare, openly and clearly, what the problem was. It is that direct and probing question of Jesus which propels the final healing power of the event. Jesus somehow has the ability to strike at the heart of the illness and poverty of Bartimaeus. But the healing is complete, the discipleship is complete, only when Bartimaeus claims it, just as we are healed only when we voluntarily accept it. Jesus says to each of us, "Tell me, exactly and precisely and clearly, what it is that you want."

Bartimaeus claims his healing with an honest and clear declaration of what he needs. Jesus calls that action faith. The one who cries out, the one who speaks directly, is the one who has faith.

One more thing this morning: Next week is Pledge Sunday here at the Cathedral of St. Philip. Between now and then, we are asking you to pray about making a financial commitment, a large and generous one, to the Church. We need it.

It's reasonable to ask, "Why should we pledge to the church?"

Our gospel today provides one answer. Because this place, this community, this journey, is meant to be an alternative to the world around us, a world with folks sitting beside the road: crying out, complaining. The Christian Church is meant to hear, and to respond to, those who cry out. The Christian Church is meant to be the journey away from the culture of complaint toward a culture of generosity.

That generosity takes faith and resurrection. Take heart and get up out of your pews next Sunday, and join the procession of pledges.

Take heart and get up today. When Bartimaeus took heart and got up, he ended up being healed, and joining the procession. He followed Jesus on the way. Let's join them: Jesus, the converted disciples, the healed Bartimaeus, and us.

The world needs us. The world needs generous Christians, not complaining Christians. Throw off the cloak of complaint and illness. Join the procession of generosity and resurrection. Our procession will transform the world.

AMEN.

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