

the best of intentions. Yet, instead of reaching out to Jesus we just continue our same routine and our same attitudes. We might want to be a Godlier parent or Godly spouse, but we do not seek God's help. We have the best intentions. We hear about a need and think to ourselves we could make a difference, but we are too busy in our routine and too comfortable in our own blindness. We cannot change by doing the same thing every day. We need help.

Jesus offers us the possibility for change. Jesus offers us the possibility to transformation. Jesus offers us a life that we could only hope for.

Bartimaeus also reminds us that our time is now. Bartimaeus knew that Jesus was passing by. There would be no other opportunity for Bartimaeus. In the same way, the Bible is clear that this moment and this day is the day we have. Yes, it is true that through God's grace, God's offer through Jesus will be ours tomorrow as well, but each day is the day that is ripe for forgiveness, newness, and a new way of living. Bartimaeus would not let his moment pass by. He knew that this day was the day of salvation.

The Bible reminds us of the importance of today. Today is the day of salvation. We are to work while it is still called today. We are not to worry about tomorrow for each day has enough worry of its own. Today is our day. This is our day and Jesus is with us and we can remain as we are or we can ask for God's help to change.

Wendell Berry has suggested that "to treat life as less than a miracle is to give up on it." Well, today, eagerly, painfully, obediently, Bartimaeus refuses to give up on the miracle called life, the miracle called faith, and the miracle called Jesus. ▲



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# Help! I Need Somebody

Mark 10:46-52

## TRINITY PULPIT

**H**elp! I have fallen and can't get up. That was the catch phrase of commercials in the 1980s and 1990's that created not only an industry of care for those who lived alone, but also created a phrase that became object of laughter. The commercials, although about a serious issue, did not feature the greatest actors or were the best in production and so the catch phrase, "Help, I have fallen and can't get up" became the object of many jokes and responses, which made people laugh and smile.

However, the original issue was an important one. An alert pendulant that could be pressed by seniors who were home alone and needed help could be pushed and someone would respond and call 911. In many cases, it might have saved someone's life. Many of us know the horrible stories of friends and relatives who fell at home alone and could not get to a phone, and many who laid in their apartments or homes for days waiting for help. Just the thought of those we love being in pain and in that desperation causes us grief.

When one of my children was in college, I will not name her, she had no trouble calling and asking for help. In fact, because every phone call normally began with "Daddy I need," I changed her ringtone on my phone to "Help, I Need Somebody" by the Beatles. But the truth is that is rare. Most of us have trouble asking for help.

M. Nora Klaver suggests that asking for help is a universal dreaded endeavor. In her book "Mayday: Asking for Help in Times of Need" she states we have a hard time asking for help.

Whether we're struggling with getting that heavy bag in the overhead bin on the airplane, or fixing a flat tire by the side of

the road, Americans are much more likely to say, "I'm good" instead of "Can you help?" unless it's an emergency that involves calling in professional helpers like police and firefighters.

If we fall and can't get up, we'd generally rather crawl out to the street, and get in the car than inconvenience someone else, and thus reveal our problem or weakness. "I got this," we'd prefer to say.

In her research, Klaver suggests a number of reasons we Americans don't ask for help, and try, instead, to do it on our own:

- *We were never taught how to ask for help, and have few role models.* Our grandparents were part of a generation that valued hard work and self-sufficiency. Asking for help was only in play if one was, say, drowning at sea. That ethic of self-sufficiency has been passed down to us.

- *We love our independence.* In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Robert Putnam reports that Americans are becoming more isolated from one another as attendance has decreased in clubs and community service organizations, including the church. The advent of the Internet enables us to pretty much do most things on our own by tapping on a few keys. We don't need to go to a physical store for a lot of our shopping, nor do we need to even be present in a classroom to get an education, which means we never have to interact with potentially helpful clerks or stodgy professors.

- *We don't think to ask.* Klaver says that we have been so brainwashed by the American ethic of self-sufficiency that asking for help just never comes to mind. We're so focused on caring for ourselves that we don't even realize when we need help.

- *It's easier to do it ourselves.* "If you want something done right, do it yourself" is a popular American idiom. We don't want to be indebted to anyone, and be in a position of having to reciprocate someday.

- *We're afraid to ask.* We're afraid of what asking for help might say about us. We'd rather die a thousand deaths than have someone else think that we can't do things on our own.

In short, we're very good at trying to do it ourselves, achieving modest results, instead of getting real help and making real progress. We miss out on the gifts that someone else can give us.

In our story today about Bartimaeus, we discover a man who is not afraid to ask for help. The description of Jesus ministry and in Jericho and with Bartimaeus is stated in very succinct terms. It is almost as though Mark, in his brevity, is reminding us that the moment for help comes and goes quickly. The door for opportunity to receive help is not open forever. The moments that can transform our lives are just moments. These moments pass and are gone. In this case it is Jesus who is passing by and the moment is ripe for transformation, but Bartimaeus had to cry out.

Jesus and His disciples have been to and through Jericho. There is no description of Jesus' ministry in Jericho. Something must have happened because there is a large crowd following Him as He is leaving the city. We can only assume what has happened as Jesus has passed through Jericho. Now on His way leaving the city He passes by a blind man who was sitting by the roadside begging.

Bartimaeus could not have been described with more desperate terms. Although the language is not filled with illustrative terms, Bartimaeus' description is enough. Here is what we can gather about this man for whom his moment of help has come.

Bartimaeus was a blind beggar. He is categorized as a pathetic figure. He is regarded as someone who has little or no value. He is not working, but sitting by the roadside begging. He represents the opposite of human flourishing and productivity. In the eyes of society he is virtually worthless and is someone who exists at the bottom of social ladder and lives at the margin. In Bartimaeus' world, people like him were left to himself and they had to fend for themselves.

Interestingly, his name is not even really given in this

story. Bartimaeus, as we refer to him, is not a name but a designation. He is literally the son of Timaeus. The beggar's name, his name, that which designates him as a person who is unique and of worth is not really mentioned. Maybe he did not have a name, or if he did it was long forgotten by everyone because he was of so little worth. Maybe when the people referred to him they referred to him as the "the blind beggar, you know the son of Timaeus." He is the kind of person that should have lived and died and never been remembered. However, he is remembered because of one reason. He cried out to Jesus.

As Jesus is passing by, Bartimaeus cries out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." It is interesting that this is the first time Mark uses this term Son of David. It is a term that indicates something important about Jesus. There seems to be an insight by the blind man. The blind man calls out "Son of David." It is a royal term; it is connecting Jesus to King David and to a grander purpose and calling. Jesus was not just a traveling preacher, teacher and healer. He was the Son of David on His way to Jerusalem.

As Bartimaeus calls out, the crowd tells him to be quiet. They shush him. Well not really. They rebuke him. It is not a polite please be quiet or please hold it down. It is shut up. It is stay in your place and keep your mouth shut. No one wants to hear from you. But the more they tell him be quiet the more he cries out. When Jesus hears him, he stops. Jesus who is passing by...stops. He instructs the ones who have been saying be quiet to now say, "tell him to come to Me." They tell the blind man who cannot see that Jesus has stopped "be of good courage, on your feet, He is calling you." Then in a very dramatic description Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, which would have had all the money he had collected, and goes to Jesus. Jesus asks, "What do you want Me to do?" Jesus of course knows, but Bartimaeus needs to state it. I want to see. Jesus says, "Go your faith has healed you." In that moment, years of blindness go away and sight is restored. In one moment of asking Jesus for help, of admitting his need, his sight returns. Jesus told him to go, but we are told he did not go at least not at first; instead he followed Jesus along the road. The truth is when Jesus tells us to go He is telling us to follow Him. That is what Bartimaeus did.

In a culture where it is hard to ask for help what are we to learn from the man who would cry out all the more for help.

First, we must realize our need. The first step to healing of any kind is to admit our need. We do live in a culture where we are not to ask for help. We are to be self-starters, we self medicate, we are self-sufficient. We rely on self. That is what we are told to do. I don't know then why we are so surprised that American culture in particular is filled with people who believe that spirituality is about self and finding your own way and making your own way. That is true whether we try to achieve spirituality on our own or whether it is we feel that this is a private matter and not to be shared in community.

Yet the Bible is clear that we cannot be self-sufficient when it comes to our salvation and our faith. First, we need Jesus. There is no way to the Father except through Jesus. Our sinfulness cannot be overcome by our own attempts at goodness. In addition, the Bible reminds us that we are to live in community the church. Ours is not a private religion or spirituality. Living in community is helping each other is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. To be honest, it is harder to live a life of faith in community than it is as an individual. It is harder because we have to learn to forgive and to put others before self. In other words, we have to learn to be like Jesus and that is learned not in solitude but in community.

So, in a culture that says do it yourself, we discover that transformation actually comes when we say, "I need help."

My friends, admitting our need is the first step of salvation and it is essential to following Jesus. When we finally say honestly to God "I cannot do this on my own and I need you, we have made the first step toward true strength." Our first step in faith is to say, "Help, I need somebody."

Bartimaeus reminds us of the need of persistence in prayer. Bartimaeus calls out and is told to stop and yet, cries out all the more. He is persistent in prayer. However, we must note that our persistence is not about God's reluctance, but about our faithfulness. God is not a reluctant God. Jesus is not reluctant to heal Bartimaeus. God is not reluctant to bless us

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and generously give us all things. Our persistence in prayer is not a sign of God's reluctance, but our need for faithfulness. When we are persistent in any matter then we are focused and we give it attention. The same is true in prayer. When we are persistent in prayer, we are revealing our need and placing our focus and attention toward God. We are expressing our dependence upon God. Bartimaeus reminds us of the importance of persistence in prayer that reveals our dependency.

To call for help is also to be aware that there are possibilities for our lives that are beyond our current experience. Notice that Bartimaeus continues to cry out for mercy. When asked what Jesus can do for him, he simply replies I want to see again. Bartimaeus could have sat right there and kept quiet. He could have held on to all he had known for years and that was his place, his condition, his cloak, his money that he had already collected that day. He could have held on to the final bit of his security but he did not. He believed that there was something more with Jesus than what his own life had for him.

There is an old saying that the definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing over and over again thinking that the outcome is going to be different. It is interesting that this is true whether it is in our lives as individuals, or at work and even in the church.

Bartimaeus had a routine, he had a way of survival and as much as we might look at him and feel sorry for him, he had found a way to live and survive. Sometimes we get so comfortable with the way things are we are blind to the possibilities that might await us should we take the risk of change.

That is the case for Bartimaeus. He is who he is. He is blind. He is a beggar. He is known and that is his place but in that moment when Jesus is passing by he has the courage and the faith to believe that there might be more than what he is experiencing. There are possibilities with Jesus that he would have never dreamed for himself. Jesus creates the opportunity for there to be a transformation of life.

Let me ask you today how long will you continue in the same manner as you have before? We have