



## “Called or Called Out”

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*Mark 10:46-52*

I've been feeling like a disciple of Jesus lately. No, not the one who cast aside his nets and tripped over the daily catch to catch up with Jesus; no, not the one with eagerness who jumped into the salty sea to swim to a surfing Savior; no, not the one who accompanied the transfiguring and transforming Jesus up the mountaintop. No, I'm more like the one who thinks he knows what's best for Jesus by telling him he should live rather than give his life. I'm the one who seems to get in the elbow jousting matches with other followers for a seat of power. I'm the one who gets mad at the crowds, mad at the children, mad at the beggar.

Just as Jesus calls out the disciples and those in the crowd who shush the begging Bartimaeus, I feel most days that I am being called out for not doing anything right. Even in my own mind and spirit I call myself out for not visiting this person, texting that person, spending more time with my family, praying more, giving help to the hopeless, hope to the helpless. I can't seem to get this “following Jesus” thing right most days. I sometimes feel blind to the way of Jesus.

I'm sure there are days when we all feel called out for not being better ministers, better managers, better leaders, better spouses, better people... better disciples. We feel like we just can't figure out our callings and we lack direction and vision. Wouldn't we much rather have abundant faith and clear spiritual sight so when we hear Jesus calling to us we respond immediately, leaving everything behind to follow him on the way? Wouldn't it be great to not feel out of touch and blind to what God is doing in the world?

Bartimaeus was sitting, begging by the side of the road in the gutter, the place where the outcasts were pushed to the edge and the criminals crucified. He knew his place, his lot in life was to be a vagrant, a blind man, a sinner. In Aramaic, the name Bar-Timaeus, greatly resembles the phrase, Son of Poverty. His place was beside the way, so that he wouldn't be in the way. However, sitting beside the way heightened his other senses. He could hear the flapping of the cloaks and the slapping of the sandals against the cobbled Jericho road. He could smell the musty scent of livestock. He could reach out and feel the fur and matted mud. He could smell the fine foods transported by pious pilgrims making their way for Passover in Jerusalem. He could hear the clinking of the coins falling into his cloak, the same cloak used to keep him warm at night and shield him from the sun during the day-- the cloak used for begging to capture those clinking coins. But the sound of generosity was made mute by the scorn from the crowd. “Get out of my way, you beggar, you son of poverty!” Bartimaeus didn't want to be called out anymore! He wanted to be called, called to something more.

But the road to transformation and reformation is often long and dangerous. Bartimaeus was a beggar on the Jericho Road. This was the same road in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It was

called the “Way of Blood” because bandits robbed, beat, and killed people on this “way.” It would be a way of blood for Jesus as well; a way of blood leading to Jesus sweating blood in the garden and dripping blood on the cross; a way of blood not only changing in altitude but in attitude. Transformation took place on this “Way of Blood.” A blind man, in his lowest of lows, right outside Jericho, the lowest of cities geographically, needed compassion, generosity, assistance. He needed someone to grab his hand and lead him on the way, to ascend from his lowly gutter to the holy mountaintop. He was on the side of the road, beside the way. He was feeling called out for his sins and called out for his situation. He wanted to feel called, called to more than his life as a Son of Poverty. Who would stop calling him out and actually take his hand?

Ok. So, Amanda really loves foreign films. And she tries really hard for me to love foreign films too, mostly to no avail. But I finally gave in and watched the Academy Award Nominated French comedy *Amelie* with her. And I loved it. There is one scene especially when *Amelie*, the main character, heeded the call to help a blind man. *Amelie* was an awkward girl who grew up with limited contact with her family and limited connections to the outside world. A series of events gave her the energy and initiative to start being bold, doing good things, and changing people’s lives. *Amelie* regularly encountered a blind beggar by the side of the subway tracks. With her newfound ability to do good, she grabbed the blind beggar by the arm and pulled him from the side of the road, the sidewalk, the gutter. She pulled him out into the middle of the street and narrated their “way” together:

*Let me help you. Step down. Off we go!  
 We just passed the drum major's widow!  
 She's worn his coat since the day he died. Careful.  
 The horse's head on the butcher's has lost an ear!  
 That's the florist laughing. He has crinkly eyes.  
 In the bakery window there are lollipops.  
 Mmmm... smell that!  
 They're giving out melon slices.  
 Sugarplum ice cream!  
 We're passing the pork butcher.  
 Ham, 79 francs.  
 Spareribs, 45!  
 Now the cheese shop.  
 Picodons are 12.90. cabecous 23.50.  
 At the butcher's a baby's watching a dog that's watching chickens roasting.  
 Now we're at the newspaper kiosk by the metro.  
 I'll leave you here. Bye!*

After *Amelie* left him, the blind man lifted his head to heaven displaying an intense grin on his face with an equally intense glow of enlightenment illuminating from him. He had a moment of vision because *Amelie* was called to help him. And in return, he no longer felt called out for being an outcast, he felt called to connection and friendship.

We see the same in Bartimaeus. We see enlightenment; we see faith. Maybe it's more important for us to refer to Bartimaeus by the Greek rendering of his name, *timeo*, meaning "honor." This Son of Honor offers us a glimpse of faith. Bartimaeus shows us that faith ends his blindness and begins his healing. Bartimaeus shows us that faith is about God doing for us when we cannot do for ourselves. Bartimaeus shows us that faith leads us to places we thought we would never go. When the world is dim, faith helps us feel as if we are called rather than called out.

As Bartimaeus was begging on the side of the road, he was told that the person in the passing crowd, that individual causing the commotion, was Jesus of Nazareth. Identifying Jesus as a Nazarene really only exposed his low caste, peasant status. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Yet the blind man saw Jesus, not as a Nazarene but as the Messiah, not as the son of a backwoods carpenter, but the Son of David. Bartimaeus, with his faithful vision, saw Jesus. This blind beggar saw the Son of God while the soon-to-be crucified Servant, in return, saw the Son of Honor rather than the Son of Poverty.

Jesus not only saw Bartimaeus, but he also saw his disciples stumbling through their spiritual blindness. Throughout Mark's Gospel Jesus's followers, those closest to him, just didn't get it. Moments before encountering Bartimaeus, James and John asked Jesus, like a magician, to do whatever they asked of him. Jesus's response, "What do you want me to do for you?" James and John then asked that when glory comes, one of them should sit on Jesus's left and the other on his right. They wanted prestige, power and position, as they cast a blind eye to Jesus's perpetual pronouncements that the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

And then, Jesus asks that piercing question again to blind Bartimaeus in the Gospel lesson for today. "What do you want me to do for you?" The disciples, who were blind, asked for a place of honor while the Son of Honor asked for a place of purpose and of calling. Bartimaeus wanted to see again, to see his family, a sunset, the morning dew on the cobbled street, the face of Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" This phrase showed up for a second time in the text as if Mark wanted to tell the readers that their literary blindness, the Messianic Secret, was over and that Jesus's journey to the cross was now beginning. We know the disciples' days of being called out for not seeing were definitely not over, but there was hope for better vision, for healing, for calling.

And there is hope for us too. That hope comes in how Jesus responds to those miniscule places of faith in our lives that feel clouded by blindness. Jesus sees us. Jesus sees us as called even when we feel called out by the failures in our lives. The disciples, at the request of Jesus, told the blind beggar, "Take heart. Get up. Jesus is calling you!" In the times when we get called out for our selfish desires to gain power, prestige, and position, Jesus says, "Take heart!" When we get tired and frustrated with the hungry crowds pressing to Jesus, Jesus says, "Get up!" When we hear the cries of those who are sidelined, by the side of the road, shouting for Jesus and we are quick to silence them and remind them that they are nobodies; when we are quick to hush the poor, silence the hurting, condemn the divorced, marginalize women, shun an ethnic minority; when we call "them" out for being wrong and that they can't see Jesus and their place is by the side of the road; when our blind spots keep the outcasts from being "in the way," Jesus still says to us, "I am calling you. I am calling you when the world has called you out. I am calling you

when the world has kept you sidelined. I am calling you when you are depressed and defeated and don't want to get out of bed in the morning. I am calling you."

Bartimaeus was being called out and told to shut up. But he didn't shut up even though people told him to. When we are called out, we are so quick to fall silent, worried about offending or hurting feelings or being rejected. But Bartimaeus didn't remain silent. He was free. Free to change his history. Free to defy his critics. Free to deny his condition. Free to call for help. Free to make his needs known to Jesus. Free. Perhaps he'd suffered enough, or felt like there was nothing left to lose, or that he was done being called out and that he was ready to be called to a greater purpose. Perhaps he finally "saw" that in the presence of Jesus all the rules had changed and he was no longer "Blind Bartimaeus" or "Son or Daughter of Poverty" but instead "Bartimaeus, Child of God, Son or Daughter of Honor." Whatever the reason, Bartimaeus knew he was free. He seized his faith and had the courage to live into that freedom. He was made well and he was called to follow in faith.

Today, you might feel called out, put out, down and out, left out. You might feel blinded and burned out. You might be in need of the healing love of Jesus and the world is screaming at you to get back in your place. Or, we might be a church that is being called out for being too accepting, too passionate, too radical. But I don't think we are called out. I think we are called. We are a called church, a church that is reformed and always reforming. We are called, not called out. We need to live as those who are healed, not those who are blind. We need to live into our freedom in Christ and our passion to change the world.

So, how do we respond to Jesus's call to us? We go. We throw away our cloaks, our comfort, our security and we jump up and we let Jesus reveal the sights and visions of the world that appear in the middle of the way, in the middle of God's work in the world. We might still be shortsighted and nearsighted like the disciples, and the world will still call us out. But if we heed the voice of God, the one who says, "Take heart. Get up. I am calling you," we might just be healed enough to see, to follow Jesus, and to realize that we are all indeed called.

Amen.