

Bartimeus Mark 10: 46-end

Bartimeus is, quite frankly, a nuisance. He is a beggar and a noisy one at that. He shouts until he gets attention and the more you tell him to be quiet the noisier he becomes. We all know people like Bartimeus.

Let's think about the story of Bartimeus as a mission encounter. Let's look and see how Jesus handles it.

We all know that the best way of avoiding a noisy beggar is to continue as if you have not heard. This used to happen to me often in Liverpool. I would have spent all day with the weird and wonderful collection of people at 'Somewhere Else' and was heading for the station and my dinner, when a voice would shout out from the pavement 'Hey, Barbara'. Inside I would be thinking 'Go away, I've done enough good work for one day!'

The error is to stop. Because once you have stopped you have become involved, and once you are involved there are consequences.

Jesus stops but he doesn't take Bartimeus off to a corner and have a private conversation he says to the disciples, 'go and get him'. So they are involved too. Immediately there is involvement, there is community. Christianity is not a private encounter with a personal God, but a 'together thing'. We are involved together.

Of course being together is both creative and complicated. And it tends to be both because of issues around power – who has it and how we share it. We all know that issues of power plague the church, and usually in petty ways, like who has access to the teaspoons!

Jesus says to Bartimeus, 'What do you want me to do for you?' At one level this is a pretty silly question to a blind man. But Jesus isn't making any assumptions. The power stays with Bartimeus, he can make the choice – he might have wanted a new begging bowl!

Not making assumptions is really hard. We all tend to think we know what is good for other people, especially people on the street. They need to give up drinking, or get a house or stop having disastrous relationships. But the mission of the church is not to make assumptions but to enable encounters in which we meet as human beings, alongside, on the same street.

I wonder what happened next for Bartimeus?

Here is a reflection that I wrote, thinking about that missionary encounter:

At the end of the day, Bartimeus sat down with the disciples
He stared at his hands, seeing them for the first time
He was once again at the edge of the crowd but the colour and buzz of the people around him made him feel included. A smile of joy spread across his face. He, Bartimeus was going to be one of the top disciples now. He could follow the crowd and be heard without shouting from the kerbside.

(slide 1)

But then he looked down at his hands, it was the first time he had seen them and he studied them closely. They were brown and dusty, his nails were broken and stained. The lines on his palms were engrained with filth. He felt suddenly ashamed, he could not only see but he could be seen.

(slide2)

Then he noticed he was still clinging to his begging bowl. It had been part of him for so long.

Now he would have to find another way of life

It was full of the usual stuff, an old coin, a tuft of wool, a seed.

(slide3)

All the rubbish that people had turned out of their pockets as they pitied him but were reluctant to part with anything valuable. It was easy to cheat a blind man

He was suddenly angry, he had been treated like rubbish for too long.

He jumped to his feet, he had to complain to someone.

There was Jesus again standing quietly at his elbow. 'What's the matter old man, are you still protesting?'

"Look at all this rubbish that people have left in this bowl' he blurted out 'I may be able to see but I am still a beggar with nothing!'

(slide 4)

It may be rubbish to you Bartimeus, but in this bowl you have a lost coin, a mustard seed, a sprinkling of yeast. Yes and a pearl of great price! You even have a clue as to the whereabouts of the lost sheep. (slide 5). Bartimeus you are a poor man but you have the kingdom of God in your lap! People the world over are hunting for this treasure (slide 7) Stop following behind me Bartimeus shouting about how the world has cheated you – go and make sure that these things get to the people who are searching for them! (slide8)

Take a bowl

This is you, your country, your church

What are you protesting about needlessly?

What things do you need to let go?

Walk around the room

Take a pearl, a piece of wool, a coin, a seed, a sprinkling of yeast

What do you have that is precious beyond price?

Who is lost and where are you searching for them?

What precious things have been discarded that you could gather?

What new things are growing that are seeds of hope?

What small things bring life to your community?

As you walk, talk with the people around you and share what you have in your bowl!

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