

“The Power of Jesus’ Voice”
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Mark 10:46-52

When I was in high school, just like a lot of you, I heard the term, *peer pressure*, a lot. It was usually, if not always, meant in a negative way.

Peer pressure caused kids to participate in robberies and rumbles. It led them to do drugs and to drink underage. We blamed peer pressure for teenage pregnancy and vandalism and graffiti. Peer pressure pushed kids to jump off bridges and break into buildings, to steal packs of gum and to decorate their neighbors’ houses with toilet paper and throw eggs on Halloween. I never did that ☺

Peer pressure was all about wanting to fit in and doing whatever we could to follow the edgy-yet-influential kids who held the keys to acceptance.

Later on, we realized that we could be all we wanted to be without bending to negative peer pressure.

And at some point, we came to understand that peer pressure could, in certain circumstances, be a *good* thing. When someone you truly admire and respect is getting good grades, you are suddenly motivated to study more. When someone you like and identify with is attending scout meetings and youth group at church, suddenly, you realize that being aloof and *cool* is not all it’s cracked up to be and being part of a supportive and life-giving group can be a really great experience.

No one knows what blind Bartimaeus had been through or what his childhood was like or how he had lost his sight. All we know is that he knows that Jesus is going to pass by and that he is ready to make a ruckus, to call out and grab the famous healer's attention by causing a stir. What does he have to lose?

When the gospel writers use a specific name in a story, it usually means that either the name is symbolic or that there was an actual person by that name whom Jesus encountered, someone who lived on in the early church's memory because of the significance of Jesus' interaction with them. Or it could be because of their influence in the Christian movement over time. In this case, Mark even names Bartimaeus' father, *Timaeus*, adding credibility to the story.

It turns out, though, that the name *Timaeus* means *unclean*. *Bar* means *son of*, so Bar-timaeus means *son of the unclean one*. Coincidence or literary device, Mark introduces us here to someone who is feeling a desperate need for Jesus' attention.

When Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, who at this point in the gospel narrative has become something of a rock star, the crowd tells Bartimaeus to simmer down and be quiet. *Don't bother Jesus. He has more important work to do. You are one of thousands of unclean, undesirable, needy people who are constantly asking too much from the One whom we think is the Messiah. Back off.*

But there is something interesting, not only about how Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus (insistently, incessantly, impudently), but also about *what* he says to Jesus.

He doesn't call out, *Hey, you! I need help! Come here!* No. He says, *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!*

Bartimaeus calls Jesus by name, not just by his title, which makes it a more intimate encounter. By saying, *Jesus*, and then adding, *Son of David*, Bartimaeus names Jesus' ancestry, connecting him to the most important ruler in the history of his people. And then he says, *Have mercy on me*, admitting his vulnerability and showing his humility.

It'd not hard to understand why Jesus stops and takes notice of Bartimaeus. We'd like to think that the Jesus we know would have stopped for anyone, even an injured Roman Centurion. But we don't know.

What we do know is that Jesus pauses in his relentless traveling and offers Bartimaeus the chance to see again.

Whether he is physically blind or blind in some other way, we don't know. Even if he is physically blind, those of us whose eyes work OK can relate to him. Each one of us has mental and emotional blind spots, whether or not our eyes function properly. We miss things. We can't see our own mistakes. We misunderstand one another. We do not see the injustice and the need that are right in front of our eyes.

But Bartimaeus knows. He knows that he is blind and he is determined to get Jesus' attention and to ask for his help.

But blindness does not occur in a vacuum. Our disabilities and our mistakes and misunderstandings and misjudgments all happen within families and communities and within societal and cultural realities.

We hear other people saying ridiculous things and we say, *Yeah! What she said!* Even when *What she said* is completely wrongheaded. And often, when we suffer, the pain lasts much too long because the systems and societies and clans to which we

belong either can't or won't help to make things better. Sometimes, they make things worse.

When we refuse to believe that racism exists in America in 2015, 150 years after the end of legalized slavery, we contribute to the suffering of others and we show our blindness. Guns make us less safe, not more safe – that is truth, borne out by facts. When we refuse to accept that and refuse to make changes, people suffer.

When Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, the crowd (that's us), orders him to be quiet and to leave the master alone. Someone as important as Jesus does not have time for a street person with an annoying habit of yelling out in public.

But...when Jesus hears Bartimaeus, he says, *Call him here.*

With that simple, three-word sentence, *everything* changes. The crowd undergoes a startling and lightning-fast transformation from a judgmental pack of cranks to a compassionate community. *Take heart! Get up! He is calling you,* they say to Bartimaeus.

It must have been hard for Bartimaeus to hear Jesus' voice amidst the discouraging voices of the crowd. And it must have been hard for Jesus, too. Sometimes, when we are the ones in power or who intend to be helpful, it's hard to know which voice is deserving of our attention. It's never black and white.

But both Bartimaeus and Jesus are able to see through – or listen through – all of the fear and distraction and they recognize one another.

Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus as the One who can help him to see again – to see physically, perhaps, but also to see truth and to see the future that God intends for him, to have hope.

And Jesus recognizes in Bartimaeus someone who truly believes that God can make a difference in his life, someone who genuinely wants to see the world as it is, himself as he is, and the man God wants him to be.

And the people in the crowd come to recognize their own role in facilitating the healing work of God.

Isn't it amazing how powerful three words can be. *Call... him... here...* Jesus speaks, and the world becomes brand new. Jesus speaks, and a *mob* becomes a *church*. Jesus speaks, and a human being can see again.

Jesus speaks.

Thanks be to God! Let's listen.

Amen.