

**Psalm 34:1-3** I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall ever be in my mouth. I will glory in the LORD; let the humble hear and rejoice. Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD; let us exalt his Name together. (44)

### Introduction

Our gospel reading today reminded me that our encounters with God change us. I know that for me, this is the case. While the encounters vary from one to another and are difficult to pin down as this thing or act, an encounter with God in the event of faith brings me from a moment ago when I *was* this version of myself to *now* where I am this new version because of the encounter with God in the event of faith.

The most profound experience was when I became “Christian”. I was at the end of my rope, falling apart in so many ways, lost, chaotic, upside-down in all the ways one could imagine. I was devouring myself from the inside while I was letting the world have at me from the outside. And then...Jesus. I met Jesus in the isolation of my apartment in Hoboken, NJ, and left everything on the ground and took hold of his outstretched hand. And then I followed. *I couldn't not follow*. My life was changed; I could see, I could hear, I could think, I could speak, I could feel in *new* ways; words and thoughts and deeds became fruitful seeds dropping into soil rather than weeds needing to be pulled out.

Other experiences of God-encounters in faith have come and gone. Many significantly smaller and simpler than the very first logged in the books by my own hand. Maybe it's in the first sip of coffee, or the succumbing to exhaustion at the end of the day; in laughing with old friends and crying with a new one; in making bread in my kitchen and breaking bread at this table here in this church; in placing food into hands covered in dirt because that mud was too enticing and placing spiritual nourishment into hands that have seen so much; from moments outside these walls and moments inside these walls, the encounters with God in the event of faith are prosperous in possibility. There is no formula for them; they just happen, and they always catch me by surprise and change me as I find myself, once again, transitioned from was to is while taking hold of that outstretched hand of Christ and following.

### Mark 10:46-52

Now, he, throwing off his cloak, rushed in and came toward Jesus. And then Jesus answered him and said, “What do you wish I would do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Teacher, that I might recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Depart, your faith has healed you.” And immediately he recovered sight and was following [Jesus] on the way.” (Mk. 10:50-52)<sup>1</sup>

Jan mentioned last week that all these stories and the discussion of what it means to be a disciple are leading up to Jesus arriving up to Jerusalem. She's right. Mark doesn't always mention the specific location when he tells a story. Sometimes it feels as if Jesus is teleported

---

<sup>1</sup> Translation mine unless otherwise noted

from here to there. However, this time, we get a clear and intentional geographical location: Jericho. This is the last stop before Jesus arrives at the outer limits of Jerusalem, just a day's travel from Jericho.<sup>2</sup>

Mark tells us Jesus came to Jericho and as he is leaving, he encounters one who, having no sight and no belongings, recognizes who he is: Jesus, the son of David; this is no small claim. For all intents and purposes, this "son of David" was equivalent to "Christ" (Χριστός) but with more national and royal identity; according to this blind beggar, this is Jesus, *the Messiah*.<sup>3</sup> And here we begin to encounter a new facet to the discussion carried through the text. Not only do those who follow Jesus need to re-examine what it means to be a disciple of Christ, but they will also have to contend with their commonsense expectation of who Messiah is and what Messiah will do as Jesus's ministry becomes more public.

Mark continues to tell us that this blind beggar, Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus—after being chided and rebuked by the crowd to be quiet—shouted all the more and all the louder, ***Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!*** Once again, Jesus doesn't tolerate chiding and rebuking and sides with the one calling on him.<sup>4</sup> Jesus doesn't only acknowledge him, but he halts (himself and most likely the crowd) and tells the crowd to call the beggar to him. Immediately the chiding and rebuking crowd become eager and encouraging as they tell Bartimaeus to go to Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

Bartimaeus, the blind beggar publicly declaring Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel, throws off his cloak and rushes to Jesus. Jesus asks him, *what do you wish I would do for you?* Bartimaeus is

---

<sup>2</sup> RT France *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* NIGTC Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. 421-22. "The preparation of the disciples for Jerusalem has already reached its climax in v. 45, but this final incident on the way moves the plot on from the vague geographical information of 10:1 to a specific location, Jericho, the last town before the traveller reaches the environs of Jerusalem, a mere day's walk away. So we see Jesus and his disciples, with a growing crowd of fellow pilgrims, leaving this last town for the strenuous climb up from the Jordan valley to the city more than 1,000 metres above. But as they set out, the company is augmented by a further and unexpected recruit."

<sup>3</sup> France *Mark* 423. "For Jewish people it would be functionally equivalent to Χριστός but the voicing of David's name increases the loading of royal and nationalistic ideology which it carries. Peter's recognition of Jesus as ὁ Χριστός in 8:29 would have given a sufficient basis for the disciples to use such language, if Jesus had it (8:30). But they have observed the ban, and so its first use now by an outsider is remarkable. No other onlooker has interpreted Jesus in messianic (as opposed to merely prophetic) terms in this gospel. Whether we should think of Bartimaeus as having unusual spiritual insight or as simply aiming to gain attention by the most flattering address he can think of, his words open up a new phase in the gradual disclosure of Jesus in Mark. For it is now time, as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, for the messianic aspect of his ministry to become more public..."

<sup>4</sup> France *Mark* 424. "Like the disciples in 10:13, they (πολλοί, not just the disciples this time) rebuke someone of no status who wants to gain access to Jesus — and like the disciples they are overruled....but whereas in those instances it was Jesus who thus prevented disclosure of his identity, here it is the crowd who try to silence the 'messianic confessor', and Jesus who takes his part against them."

<sup>5</sup> France *Mark* 424. "Given Jesus' urgency in 10:32, his stopping (and presumably bringing the whole crowd to a halt) for a beggar is remarkable. The crowd's sudden and complete change of heart indicates the authority of Jesus: they are now as enthusiastic as before they were dismissive, and become the medium for Jesus' call to Bartimaeus."

clear in response: *I wish to completely recover my sight. Done. Go*, Jesus says. *Your faith has healed you*. Bartimaeus immediately regains his vision; he can do nothing else but follow Jesus, the one who gave him his sight, the one who gave him his life, the one who took his nothing and gave him something.<sup>6</sup> Bartimaeus ignores the command to go (ὑπάγε<sup>7</sup>) and chooses instead to follow Jesus as a disciple on the way (to Jerusalem).<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

The interesting thing about Bartimaeus is how Mark juxtaposes him to the Rich young man (Mk 10:17ff). Prior to Jericho, the rich young man was the last and more likely recruit. Yet, he couldn't do that final thing: abandon his privilege and follow after Jesus. Here, Mark highlights a blind beggar who, like the rich young man, recognizes Jesus, and who, unlike the rich young man, chooses to follow Jesus at the very last minute.<sup>9</sup> Both men encountered God, but only one was transformed by that encounter and thus experienced God in his self. One had everything and needed nothing; the other had nothing and needed everything. It is the poor, blind beggar—with nothing in this earthly life to lose who encounters God and is transformed in the encounter—who does the only thing that now makes sense because of that encounter: follow. The rich young man had too much to lose to let that make sense at that time. And Bartimaeus isn't following Jesus as Jesus is growing in popularity but follows Jesus as Jesus is about to enter the most public and more devastating part of his ministry: his betrayal, his suffering, and his death.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> France *Mark* 424-25. "The 'privileged' status which Mark has given to Bartimaeus allows him not only to call on Jesus as υἱὲ Δαυίδ but now also allows him to address him already as we might expect a disciple to do....The request is expressed simply and boldly; the aorist subjunctive ἀναβλέψω looks for an instantaneous and complete recovery of sight (as in fact happens in v. 52), rather than the more protracted process we have seen in 8:23-25. Jesus' reply uses terms already familiar from other healing stories...."

<sup>7</sup> ὑπάγε is the present active imperative 2 person singular of ὑπάγω. Thus, Jesus commanded him to depart (as he's done with other recipients of divine healing), but Bartimaeus doesn't. But that's fine. France explains, In 5:19 ὑπάγε marked a refusal to allow the healed person to become a disciple, but in other cases it is simply a recognition that the person is now cured and may go, so that there is no need to see a conflict here between ὑπάγε and Bartimaeus's deciding to follow Jesus."

<sup>8</sup> France *Mark* 425. "The two terms ἀκολουθέω and ἡ ὁδός both speak of discipleship, and the prominence of the latter phrase in Act Two ensures its occurrence at the end of that Act reminds us of this central theme. Bartimaeus, now set free from his blindness, represents all those who have found enlightenment and follow the Master. So as the pilgrim group sets off again up the Jerusalem road, with one additional member, the reader is prepared to witness the coming of the Son of David to 'his' city, and challenged to join him on the road."

<sup>9</sup> France *Mark* 422. "The last potential recruit we met was an admirable, respectable, and wealthy man (10:17-22), but to the disciples' consternation he has not been welcomed into Jesus' entourage. Now we meet a man at quite the other end of the scale of social acceptability, a blind beggar. And it is he, rather than the rich man, who will end up following Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, with his sight restored, nothing to sell, and so his commitment can be immediate and complete. While we hear nothing of his subsequent discipleship, the fact that Mark records his name and his father's name suggests that he became a familiar character in the disciple group."

<sup>10</sup> France *Mark* 422. "...so now his extended teaching on the reversal of values in the kingdom of God is summed up in the recruitment of the least likely disciple, the 'little one' who is welcomed, the last who becomes first. As Bartimaeus joins Jesus ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ he functions as an example of discipleship, with whom 'Mark encourages the reader to identify'."

According to Mark, the way of the disciple is thus: follow Jesus deep down into the human experience, to be identified with the pain of others, to stand in solidarity in the fight for life and liberty of the captives, it is to weep with others who weep, too. And in it all, it is here where you find yourself, in the nitty gritty of human life, growing more in love with God and more in love with your neighbor.

As I think upon my own encounters with God, the most intriguing thing is that after my first profound experience of encounter with God in the event of faith, I believed that this encounter would lead me up and out of the world, more into the heavenly, celestial, saintly realms of spirituality and purity. However, the reality is that I am, as I follow Jesus, lead deeper down and into the world, into the depths of human suffering and sorrow, into the nitty gritty of life in ways that I didn't care for and didn't desire. As a follower of Christ, I have felt more pain and more sorrow and more sadness than I have ever felt before when my life seemed decorated with such things. As a follower of Christ, I have felt the weight of my love for God and for others increase, driving me to reach each and every little one with the love of God, to tell them how loved they are by this God of love. In this deeper in and deeper down into the human experience, I find I'm given the gift of knowing who I am, specifically who I am in Christ. The more I walk with Christ, the more I encounter God and my neighbor—in both small and big encounters, both good and bad encounters. The more I encounter God and my neighbor the more I know who I am; and the more I know who I am the more I know who I am for you and in God. And the cycle repeats.

We, as disciples (united and individual), are called to go deeper in and deeper down, to see our call and our purpose in going out into the manifold masses, proclaiming—in word and deed—God's profound and real love for them as the beloved when things are good and when things are bad, when things are big and when things are small. Those of us who have followed Jesus out of the Jordan have been and are encountered by God in the event of faith, we have been and are loved *as we are, where we are*, in every mundane day. I pray we bring this very love and encounter to others who may not have the ability to meet us here; may we meet them out there, on the way.