

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
October 27, 2024 – 23 Pentecost  
Mark 10:46-52 – Blind Bartimaeus  
United Thank Offering  
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From time to time, I invite you to read or listen to a Gospel passage and enter into it with your imagination, placing yourself in the midst of the action. Doing this – especially with an account of Jesus interacting with people – can open up the living Word of God to you in a new and vibrant way. This morning we heard one of those Gospel passages that immediately draw us into the action, the story in Mark's Gospel of Jesus healing the blind beggar, Bartimaeus. The reading begins by giving us the location of the action. Jesus and his disciples had been in Jericho, just a few miles from Jerusalem. They were leaving Jericho, and they were on the way to Jerusalem. Being "on the way to Jerusalem" means being on the way to Jesus' crucifixion.

Now, as they leave Jericho they are accompanied by a large crowd of people. This is Mark's way of emphasizing an important point: what Jesus did, what Jesus said, and who Jesus was attracted people. They wanted to be near him, to be around him. And he was well-known. The blind beggar, Bartimaeus, only needed to hear the name of the person passing by on the road to join in the shouting and ask for Jesus' help.

There are many accounts of Jesus healing people in Mark's Gospel. Bartimaeus is unique in two ways. He is the last person healed in this Gospel. And he is the only person healed by Jesus who follows Jesus after his healing, who follows him on his way to Jerusalem.

Hearing that it was Jesus on the road, Bartimaeus begins to shout. He says, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Son of David" is a name for the Messiah. So, blind Bartimaeus "sees" who Jesus truly is, a healer and much more. Mark tells us that "many sternly ordered him to be quiet," so apparently Bartimaeus' shouting was quite loud. Telling him to be quiet, however, doesn't work – Bartimaeus shouts "even more loudly." We might imagine Bartimaeus saying to himself, "No way! I'm not going to be quiet. This opportunity won't come again. I've got to take my chance!" So, Bartimaeus is persistent. Jesus told his followers to "keep asking." Bartimaeus keeps asking and gets Jesus' attention.

Jesus stops and asks the disciples to summon him. When Bartimaeus hears them say, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you," he throws off his cloak and comes to Jesus. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar. His cloak may have been his only possession, his shelter. Leaving it behind in the crowd as he did probably meant losing it for good. Bartimaeus gives up all he has so that he can answer Jesus' call. Do you remember our recent lesson about Jesus and the rich man, the man who had many possessions and could not give them up and follow Jesus?

Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants and Bartimaeus makes his request – "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus grants the request, and he says to Bartimaeus what he has said to many of the people he has healed: "Go; your faith has made you well." But instead of going, Bartimaeus follows Jesus, even to the cross.

When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was calling him, he willingly left behind his cloak so that he could spring up and go to Jesus. In what ways are we like Bartimaeus in his readiness to answer the call of Jesus and to follow him? In what ways are we like the rich man who went away from Jesus, grieving, when he learned the cost of discipleship?

It was obvious to Jesus that Bartimaeus was blind. Yet he asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" He gave Bartimaeus the freedom to ask for what was most important to him. How would you answer if Jesus asked you, "What do you want me to do for you?" This is a question worth taking time to answer. What do you most want from the Lord? You might start with something obvious, such as a medical condition for which you would like healing. But when you think prayerfully, you realize that your deepest desire is not that. It may be peace of mind. But, then to go deeper, you realize you really want to feel closer to Jesus. Once you know what you most want from the Lord, I think this lesson teaches us to shout out our request to God. Shout and shout. Persist. Keep asking, with faith that God will respond. Perhaps by granting what we ask. Perhaps by leading us to change our request. Perhaps with a deeper knowledge of God. Perhaps with the peace that passes all understanding.

In Bible study this month we considered this quote from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians: "Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (4:8). What wonderful advice, especially when we need help to sustain hope for the world! Following this advice, I would like to spend a few minutes speaking about the Episcopal Church's United Thank Offering. The UTO Ingathering is next Sunday – All Saints Sunday – and knowing more about UTO may help you to consider what you might give.

The United Offering, as it was originally named, was begun by the Women's Auxiliary of the Board of Missions of the Episcopal Church in the late 1800's, when women had very little authority in the church. The woman who was the driving force behind this effort was Julia Chester Emery. She was passionate about the cause of spreading Christ's kingdom among all people. The women of the church collected funds to support mission projects, and they retained the right to decide how the funds were used, an important step for women in the church. Money was used to send female missionaries to serve as nurses and teachers in many parts of the world. The United Thank Offering has continued through all these years to fund projects in this country and beyond. Imagine what Miss Emery and her associates would have thought to see in the future women deacons, priests, and bishops and Katharine Jefferts Schori who was elected the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in 2006.

The premise behind giving to the United Thank Offering is simple. Notice a blessing in your life for which you are grateful and in thanksgiving for that blessing, put a donation of money in a UTO "blue box." Do this every day if you can. This practice of gratitude will help you and it will help everyone who benefits from a grant from the UTO. In 2024 over a million dollars was given by the UTO in grants that focused on welcoming the stranger. Since 1889 the UTO has awarded over 144 million dollars in grants throughout the world.

This gives you some idea of the power of gratitude when it goes beyond a "Thank you, God" prayer and becomes an offering given from our resources to help others. You may not have been putting money into a blue box since last November, but you can write a check or put cash in an envelope marked for the UTO appeal and bring it to church next Sunday. Our offerings can give hope to people who need it most.

In the name of our Lord who said, "Just as you [gave] to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you [gave] to me" (Matthew 25:40). Amen.