



“Mercy”

a sermon by

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Our text this week comes from Mark 10:46-52 as we continue our walk with Jesus and through the gospel of Mark. "They came to Jericho. As (Jesus) and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way."

Most of the people that Jesus heals along the way are not given names in the gospels. They may be described- a widow, a man with a withered hand, a man who had been blind since birth. A young girl who was dying. But this man has a name. A face and a name. Bartimaeus son of Timaeus. He was someone's son. Timaeus' son. This man, blind and broke and probably begging at the city wall, was someone's son. He hears that it was Jesus coming and offers perhaps the most infamous petition in the history of Christendom. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" What we read in other places in the scripture as Kyrie Eleison in the Greek. Lord, have mercy.

I was driving to work early on Monday morning, thinking about the record low temperatures we'd seen the night before and shivering myself in the car while stopped at a traffic light. On a bench on the sidewalk next to me a large, slumped over figure of a man was covered head to toe in a tightly stretched dirty white sheet that encased him like a cocoon. Still sleeping from the night before. That man was someone's son too. Broke and broken down just outside the glass walls of the city, his hole being seemed to call out, 'Lord, have mercy.'

Several years ago a chronically homeless woman I had come to know quite well came to ask if I could call her parents for her. It was her mother's birthday and they hadn't spoken in four years as the woman was trapped in a perpetual cycle of domestic violence and locked in the prison of addiction that rendered her all but incapacitated most of the time despite everyone's efforts. "I haven't had a drink or any drugs for one whole day so that I can talk to them right." She said. "I bet they didn't think I would remember." She looked at me intently as I put their number into my phone and waited while it rang. I felt my heart skip a beat when an older man and woman's voice on the other end of the line chimed in simultaneously, "Hello?" They had picked up the phone at the same time. "Mr. and Mrs. so and so? My name is Katie Crowe. I am a minister at First Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. I'm sitting here with your daughter. She has asked me to call you, Ma'am, because she would like to wish you a happy birthday, can I put her on so that you can talk?" Her father was able to choke out the words, 'my God, please, yes, put her on'. Her mother had erupted into sobs. This frail, addicted, beaten homeless woman was their daughter. Separated from society and those she loved by great distances and unfathomable depths. She cried as they talked together across miles and

years. Each tear at the time seemed like a little wet and rolling prayer. Lord, have mercy.

The other people at the walls of the city did not seem to think that the poverty within Bartemaueus, son of Timaeus, had a right to speak to the royalty in Jesus, son of David. A whole crowd was following him at the time, so we have to wonder who it was who gathered to see Jesus outside Jericho, whose walls had been long rebuilt since that day when Joshua and the people Israel had encircled them seven times and then with a loud shout caused them to come tumbling down. It might have been the Chamber of Commerce. Maybe the Mayor or the visitors bureau. Whomever it was that gathered there, this blind, broke beggar didn't represent them well and then he starts shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me". The text is generous, it says, "Many sternly ordered him to be quiet." Which is likely another way of saying, they told him to shut his mouth. Probably worse. Everyone wants to turn a deaf ear to that unseemly commotion. Who really wants to hear what the poor have to say anyway? Lord, have mercy.

But the man would not be silenced and raises his voice, his prayer, even louder once again. He doesn't care who hears it, he doesn't care who knows, this is his shot, he's got nothing left to lose, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stops. All the action stops. Jesus isn't interested in what anyone else says. He wants to meet the blind and broke, broken down man who is asking him for mercy. He calls to his side the one whose voice no one wants to hear, whose suffering no one wants to see, whose interests no one wants to be bothered with, whose hope hangs on a chance encounter with compassion passing by. And suddenly everyone is his best friend. Lord, have mercy. Now that the celebrity miracle worker acknowledges him, words of kindness flow from everyone else-take heart, get up, he is calling you. Can it get us in good with Jesus? Will it get our name in the paper? Will others notice that we were kind to the one Jesus speaks with too? Lord, have mercy. And the man drops his cloak- effectively leaving everything- to accept Jesus' invitation to face his brokenness, to confront his shame, to name his poverty, to be laid open for all the world to see so that he could be healed there in the margins of the city. And the walls that separate those who are considered worthy of God's blessing and those who are not come tumbling down. Lord, have mercy.

This is not the story of a blind man so long ago. This is an illustration of what Jesus sees when he walks through the world today and a model for how we are to see as well. Mercy is a very complex word because it contains within it both the seeds of compassion and restraint against our more basic impulses and the motivation for justice. For when compassion reaches out to a person in need, justice takes stock of how they got there and is emboldened to do something about it. When compassion meets the gaze of the faceless, introduces itself to the nameless, Reaches out a hand to the downtrodden, justice is the wedge, the thorn, the discontent that will not be silenced until we risk standing in solidarity with the poor for good and come alongside those who are different from us in love until God's kingdom is revealed.

Christ was the embodiment of mercy. He offered the gift of compassion with his capacity to heal, but in the way that his healing rocked social norms and expectations, worked on

behalf of the poor and oppressed, and gave everyone radical access to God even in the midst of the most broken places of their lives he was a God who was intensely interested in justice and offers us all the gift of healing so that we might be compelled together to pursue the same.

‘Lord have mercy’ is a powerful prayer. It is a petition that rings out from the lives of those whose poverty stands in judgment of us for our complicity in the face of a world where there is plenty of food and yet people are going hungry. Where there is plenty of housing and yet people sleep on the streets. Where in some states the number of prisons that should be built in ten years is being calculated based on how many children are not reading on grade level in the second grade today. Where we see vast chasms of inequity in our society drawn along lines of race and yet do not challenge ourselves and our community to dig deep into the question, ‘why’ or do not hit our knees to pray for forgiveness and plead that our deep woundedness will one day be made whole.

It is God’s mercy that opens the eyes of the blind. And allows people who seek to see the world through Christ’s eyes to really see those who are sitting on the margins of our city where others cannot or will not see. It is God’s mercy that hears the voice of the silenced calling out from the crowd and compels us not to be bothered or afraid but to draw near to them as one beggar that is dependent upon grace telling another where to find bread. It is God’s mercy that says, I came not for the healthy but for the sick. Not to be served but to serve. When I was hungry, when did you feed me? When I was sick when did you comfort me? When I was in prison, when did you visit me? When I was naked, when did you clothe me? When I was a stranger, when did you invite me in? It is God’s mercy that reminds us that every man is some man’s child. And every blind, broke, and broken soul has a mother with a birthday and a name. Here outside of Jericho, the gospel imperative is campaigning in the midst of every human heart to bring the walls that divide us down with shouts of mercy, and build up together a new community founded on compassion and justice in the name of love. The way that it begins is with a recognition of our common dependence on the goodness of God alone for each breath we take, and with each breath offering a simple prayer for ourselves and the world. Kyrie Eleison- Lord, have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.