

Hopkins South Monterey

United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

November 14, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

Mark 10:46-52

NRSV

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 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." 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 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." 52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Prayers & Sermon

Loving and Gracious God,

Thank you for this time together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.

It has come time for this series to come to a close. We have made it to the final week! We have talked about Love, sharing, cooperation, shalom, and abundance since the beginning of October by walking through the stories of Jesus's teaching in the middle of the Gospel of Mark. We have heard of people asking Jesus questions with good and bad intent, we have heard Jesus correct some things that weren't making the mark, we have heard Jesus talk to all sorts of people from Jewish leaders, to the general crowd, to his small group of disciples. These stories of Jesus's teachings can teach us a whole lot, but over these weeks we have looked at these stories for the over values they teach us about. Each week we focused in on a set of values, the Kingdom

value that Jesus wants us to live out and the worldly or human value that Jesus wants us to replace. Today we are jumping back in Mark a little bit and making up for the week we skipped while I was away. This week, we are looking at Mark 10:46-52. Mark 10 is quite the long chapter: it starts with the discussion around divorce and children being welcome toward Jesus, then we hear the story of the wealthy man who asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, then the spat between the disciples on who gets to be at Jesus's right hand, and here at the end of the chapter is this short story of the healing of Bartimaeus.

There is plenty that this story brings up that we could talk about, but once again, we are going to focus on the overall values that it can teach us about. This week, the values we will be focusing on conflict vs. compassion. These are familiar words, but I find that with familiar words, it can be harder to pin down a definition in our head. So, naturally, I googled them. I appreciated this definition for conflict: to be incompatible or at variance; clash. Other definitions also include that it also means a serious disagreement or armed struggle, or opposing wishes and needs. But, I like the simplicity of "to be incompatible or at variance." All of us are really good at finding the ways that we are different than others and how we are incompatible, and when we find enough reasons, it is easy to then write someone or a situation off as not worth the potential conflict. Conflict, whether it comes to be something tangible or is as simple as an internal incompatibility, is one of the biggest barriers we have to sharing compassion with everyone. So, conflict is the value that we should be working to leave behind and Jesus is calling us to flip it to compassion. Compassion is also a bit more complex than how we think about it on the surface. The Greater Good Magazine by Berkeley University describes compassion like this: "Compassion can be thought of as a mental state or an orientation towards suffering that includes four components:" on the cognitive or inside our brain level: "Bringing attention or awareness to recognizing that there is suffering," on our mood and attitude level: "feeling emotionally moved by that suffering," on the intentional or putting into action level: "wishing there to be relief from that suffering," and lastly, on the motivational or desire to do something level: "a readiness to take action to relieve that suffering." To simplify that a bit, the four components to compassion are awareness of suffering, feeling emotionally moved by it, wanting for it to be better, and feeling motivated to do something about it yourself. The good news is that compassion is something we can practice and get stronger at, like working out a muscle. All of us are compassionate at least some of the time, perhaps depending on rest or free time or with certain people, but we all feel it at some point. Jesus is encouraging us to do what we can help our compassion grow so that it expands toward more people and in more situations.

Our scripture this morning tells us of a moment on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem when a man starts calling out to Jesus for mercy. Those on the road with Jesus tell him to be quiet. They see him as incompatible with Jesus's mission and status. They see him as a conflict of interest to Jesus's journey and tell him to stop bothering Jesus. But Jesus shows compassion for Bartimaeus, calls him over, asks what he wants, and brings his sight back.

This joins a collection of healing stories that are scattered throughout the Gospels. And acts as a metaphorical bookend with a similar healing story from Mark 8, which is another instance of sight for the previously blind. These two stories act as

literal blindness turning to sight stories to introduce and conclude a collection of stories that tell us of spiritual blindness. Between Mark 8:22 and here in Mark 10:46, we are told of Peter not seeing what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, of some of the disciples not seeing the meaning of the transfiguration on the mountaintop, of the disciples not seeing the importance of prayer in healing the boy with the unclean spirit, of them not seeing that to be greatest is to be the least, of them not seeing the importance of the little children and that we need to be serve. Within the greater story of Jesus's ministry, this is soon before the scripture tells us of Palm Sunday, another example of many people not seeing Jesus for who he truly was and killing him for it. Spiritual blindness is a main theme of the Gospel of Mark. Spiritual blindness from all those different people contributed to a lot of conflict between Jesus and those he was trying to teach and lead. This story about Bartimaeus receiving compassion and his sight from Jesus is an example of Jesus transforming literal blindness, but also continues that spiritual blindness as well.

The text begins this story by saying "They came to Jericho." But not much must have happened there, because the next sentence is "As he and his crew were leaving Jericho, they came upon Bartimaeus on the road." This little part is easy to skip over as inconsequential, but if it was so unimportant, why even mention they came to Jericho? Jericho is a pretty big deal. It is thought by some to be the oldest city in the world, it is the city where the israelites entered the promised land, it is the city of Joshua, of Rahab, the city of Herod's winter palace, a city where the Romans were very present at the time. It was full of political, historical, and theological importance. But, that city is just a blip on Jesus's itinerary. The real story that matters, the real stuff from Jesus that matters anywhere near there is this interaction with a blind man on the side of the road. The center of historical and present conflict for God's people deserves attention way less than the one who needed and deserved compassion.

In this story, the one who needs and deserves compassion is a man named Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, described as a blind beggar sitting by the roadside. During this series, we've talked a lot about Jesus's priority for the least of these. Well, the story tells us that Bartimaeus is the least of the least of these. He is the marginalized of the marginalized. He is blind which means he is physically limited and socially excluded, he is a beggar which means he is very poor and does not have a good source of income, and his name, Bartimaeus can be translated to mean son of the unclean or impure. He is excluded in all ways: he is literally outside the city and the path, figuratively outside of the path, outside of the light, outside of the religious circles, outside of the economy, outside of traditional household structure. Despite his low consideration by society and how unworthy he was by the cultural standards to be anywhere near someone as important as Jesus, Bartimaeus boldly calls out to Jesus. He is bold in calling out at all, but he also uses a bold way to name Jesus, he calls out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This was not just giving the formal title for Jesus, this was a political declaration, a dangerous one so near to a city full of Romans, that identifies Jesus as the Messiah and the true heir to the throne of David. Bartimaeus, a blind man, is seeing Jesus for his true identity while so many who were following Jesus at that moment didn't fully get it yet. Bartimaeus calls for Jesus loud and proud and those following Jesus urge him to be quiet. We aren't told why they tell him to be quiet, perhaps it is because they think he isn't worthy to take up Jesus's time like the children before. Perhaps it is

because they are more concerned about the conflict Bartimaeus could stir up through his bold declaration. Keeping the peace, avoiding conflict, was more important than whatever this clearly marginalized man could be asking Jesus mercy for. Bartimaeus is thankfully persistent, not taking the bait to be in conflict with Jesus's followers, and has faith in Jesus's compassion so he shouts out again, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus responds this time, telling those near him to call him here. They do, it feels a bit like they are saying, "Oh you're lucky, come on, get over here." Unlike the wealthy man who was unwilling to part with his many possessions, Bartimaeus jumps up to go to Jesus, leaving behind his cloak, what was likely the most valuable thing he owned as the thing that kept him warm, covered him while he slept, and helped him collect money as he sat on the road. Bartimaeus is all in for Jesus.

Jesus shows him the compassion of full dignity, not assuming what he wants or needs, but asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" So soon after John and James demanded Jesus do for them whatever they wished and Jesus rebuffed them, here he is inviting Bartimaeus to share what he wants. Bartimaeus humbly responds, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus immediately responds in the affirmative and Bartimaeus regained his sight and joined in the group following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem. Jesus's compassion transformed Bartimaeus, his sight being just part of the transformation as Jesus tells him it is about his faith and the ways he was living out discipleship. Bartimaeus was transformed from blind to sight, but also from "Road sitter to Jesus follower." From Jericho outsider to part of Jesus's followers.

Jesus leads his followers into prioritizing compassion over conflict. We are called to continue living that out as the church and as Christians. We are called to boldly act with compassion, listening and recognizing the ways others are suffering, feeling sympathy for them, wishing for something to be done to relieve that suffering, and motivation to be part of that solution. Are we boldly helping those calling out for mercy? Even when it risks rocking the boat or creating conflict? Even when it is inconvenient or creates a scheduling conflict, are we prioritizing compassion? Are we sharing compassion with those that others, even others in the church, say shouldn't deserve help? Are we listening to the cries of the marginalized for however we can help instead of looking for fault or reasons to not help? Whenever we speak out or advocate or help the marginalized, that is justice work, that is compassion and not conflict. Pushing for change so that people are not marginalized in those ways anymore is compassion work, not conflict.

Jesus calls us to continue growing toward compassion, expanding our compassion to include more and more neighbors. Sometimes we may be corrected by the Spirit or by someone else when we are not living out compassion like Jesus corrected his followers in this story, but more often, it is up to us to pay attention to how we can do better and work on it. It has been proven through psychology studies that compassion is a skill that we can work on and make better. A great way to start is to start paying attention to how compassion shows up in your mind in your day to day life. Spend a few days paying attention to yourself and notice when compassion comes easily or spontaneously for you. Is it tied to something or someone in particular? Also notice when you resist acknowledging or being with suffering throughout the day. Who or what situations are you jaded to or have a negative impression of? Notice when you

judge or minimize suffering or compare it or rank it. Do you tend to disregard a specific type of suffering? Reflect on if there is a why behind when you dismiss suffering, is it because of a past experience or the difficulty of those emotions or not knowing what to do?

Taking time to reflect on your own compassion is a great foundation. To work on increasing compassion from there can start with simple practices. Take advantage of down time when you are in public, perhaps while waiting in line at the grocery store, to look around at all the different people around you and think about the common humanity we all share. Spend time looking at the items in your cart and think about the many people who made it possible to be in your grocery cart. Take a moment to appreciate, give thanks, or pray for the people at each step of the way.

Jesus calls us to compassion instead of conflict, and even in the moment where his followers got it so wrong and tried to silence Bartimaeus, Jesus didn't get mad at them or berate them or tear them down, he gently corrected them and shifted their direction. Remember to have that grace with yourself too. There is no evidence that beating ourselves up will help us change our behavior, in fact, some data suggests that beating ourselves up like that can make us get worse. Jesus wants us to have compassion for ourselves too.

As we go into the world, may we stay committed to listen for those like Bartimaeus who are calling out for help and let us prioritize compassion over conflict. May we have faith like Bartimaeus that Jesus is here to support us in transforming the world to bring all in from the margins. May we leave behind the fears and doubts of conflict, the judgements of incompatibility and choose compassion as often as we can.

Like Jesus leaving Jericho,
your word has passed before us today.
Have mercy on us, Lord!
Others have told us to be quiet.
Many have tried to lure us away, yet we desire you.
Have mercy on us, Lord!
Then you spoke to us and called us by name,
filling us with your word.
Have mercy on us, Lord!
You ask us what we want, what we need.
There are so many things we hold in our heart:
home, family, health, our nation —
but you know our greatest need.
Lord, let us see as you see.
Have mercy on us, Lord! Amen.