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Mark 10:46-52
Jesus Stops for You
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These days it is hard to pick up the newspaper without reading about either political candidates invoking religion or religious leaders invoking politics. The political candidates are on a crusade to get elected and invoke religion when it helps their crusade. The religious leaders are on a crusade either to split or hold their denominations together, depending on which side of the political debates they find themselves. I have been around long enough to know that religion and politics have long been mixed together. I'm not too worried about that. But I think that the crusading thing worries even Jesus. Historically, crusades have never worked out well for either politicians or the church, and certainly not for those who run along the way in the name of God and country.

Just before we get to our text today, Jesus announced his decision to go to Jerusalem, the city of power. His disciples James and John considered this a crusade to take power, and they became excited about the possibilities of it. "Imagine—our man in office." Jesus looks at these two men and asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" What an incredible question!

How would you respond if Jesus looked at you and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" Would you tell him about your crusade to succeed at work; or your crusade to find someone to take away the loneliness; or your crusade to straighten out your family, our city, the nation? What do you want Jesus to do for you?

James and John said, "When you take power, make us powerful, too. Let us sit on your right and left hand, in your glory." When the other disciples heard this, they were angry at James and John, probably because that is where they'd all like to sit. We disciples have always been political. We can imagine Jesus' shoulders dropping a bit as he said to his disciples, "You've missed the point of my ministry. You still have not seen who I am."

When they got to Jericho, a town about eighteen miles east of Jerusalem, a great crowd began to follow Jesus. They were all eager to join the crusade of this new candidate they assumed was about to take the seat of power. Like James and John, they assumed there would be something in it for them. And frankly, we are all somewhere in that crowd. We know what we want. And we are certainly happy to have Jesus' help with our personal crusade. But Jesus has his own mission. It's not a crusade. It's not a quest for success at all costs. He heads to Jerusalem to fulfill his mission to offer God's forgiving mercy—most of all, for the damage we've done on our crusades.

As Jesus and the large crowd were leaving Jericho preparing to make their way to Jerusalem, suddenly, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus cried out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." The people around him say, "Shut up. Don't stop Jesus now, we're finally getting somewhere." But this familiar, unimportant beggar just kept crying out, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me."

It is fascinating that this is the first time in Mark's gospel that Jesus is called the son of David, which means the Messiah, the hope for a new and merciful kingdom to all people. It is also fascinating that his own disciples, who were so close to Jesus, could not see this. That's because they were so blinded by their own personal crusades. But ironically, the blind man who needed mercy could see exactly who Jesus is.

The next few words are among the most important in all of the Bible: "Jesus stood still." Jesus, God in the flesh, stops the parade to Jerusalem because at long last he hears the words of someone who doesn't want help but who wants a merciful Savior. In the midst of the noisy clamor of all the agendas for Jesus—agendas for our work, our children, our future—if anyone will cry out simply for the agenda of mercy, Jesus will stop everything to come to that person. "Jesus stood still." Those are words filled with hope. They depict the antithesis of a crusade. Jesus is not too busy with Iraq, Gaza, or the presidential primaries to listen to you, especially if you are asking not for help but for mercy.

To ask for help is to tell Jesus what the goal is, and ask for a little boost in reaching it. But to ask for mercy is to place your life in the hands of the Savior, asking for his goals to unfold. To ask for mercy is to realize that you need so much more than a boost. You need a miracle, something that can only come from God. You need a new way of living. Jesus may or may not help us with our own goals, but he will always stop and stand still before anyone who cries out for mercy.

Yesterday, my daughter Lyndsey gave birth to a healthy, baby boy named Adam Paul. (She has both the Old and New Testaments covered.) All weekend as I thought about this holy event, I kept remembering the day of her birth. As a young father, I took one look at her and all of the plans began to rush into my heart. Over the years of her becoming older, I kept peddling these dreams to her. At one point, I even took her to the Supreme Court and said, "Someday you'll work here, sweetheart." When parenting became more challenging, I prayed for help from Jesus in making these dreams come true. When Lyndsey then became a typical adolescent, I stopped praying for help and began praying for mercy. You see the difference?

When I gave up on my crusading agendas for her life and asked only for God to unfold his own creativity in her life, I began to enjoy her a whole lot more. And now she has done the most incredible thing of bringing a child into the world, which is something only she and God could have accomplished. Well, her husband had a little bit to do with it. My point is that I had nothing to do with this. I just get to watch her life, enjoy the mercy, and be grateful. And I think that is a pretty good job description for a new grandfather.

Notice that Bartimaeus does not ask Jesus for a few coins. That's what we would expect. We expect him to think that a rabbi is an easy mark for a handout. We expect him to think Jesus would know how politically expedient it would be to look compassionate in front of the crowd. But all of that would mean that Bartimaeus had settled into the crusades of beggars and was looking only for help to be a successful beggar. But Bartimaeus was done looking for help to be a better beggar. What he needed was a new life that could come only from God, and he knows it. So he asks for mercy.

On this weekend when we are honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it is important to remind ourselves that he was never asking for help. He wasn't begging for a few coins or even trying to negotiate seats on buses or at lunch counters. He was trying to help us see his great dream of a wholly new, merciful society that offers justice to all of its people. The dreams from heaven have never been to give us a little help, but a life changing mercy.

Jesus looked at the blind man—you have to believe that he first looked over at James and John—and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" That is the exact same question he just asked of James and John. This time it was probably the disciples' shoulders that dropped a bit. But the question was as much a mercy for them as it was for Bartimaeus.

Maybe they got it, maybe they understood when Bartimaeus responded to Jesus by saying, “My teacher, let me see again.” Maybe when the disciples heard that, they “got it,” that it is always enough to see Jesus the Savior with you. He is with you in your fears about loneliness, work, family, and health. Those fears have sent you down one crusade after another and blinded you to the joy of life. If you could see Jesus standing still before you, then you could stop trying so hard to be Jesus. You could receive salvation, which is the only way anyone “gets it.”

Jesus responded to Bartimaeus by saying, “Go, your faith has made you well.” Faith is simply a way of seeing. It is not a bunch of Christian doctrines you have to swallow. That is only a means of understanding faith. Nor is faith an emotion, which comes and goes. Faith is an act of the will, a choice to see the Savior with you.

We’re told that Bartimaeus immediately regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way. That is also what faith is—a decision to follow the Savior “on the way” wherever it leads. Most of the time you will not, anymore than Bartimaeus, know where this is leading. Again, that’s the way mercy works. Now you are following Jesus through his mission for your life. Where it all leads doesn’t really matter. Not once you’ve discovered the joy of walking with a Savior.

So, what do you want Jesus to do for you? Our text offers you two choices. Either you ask for help with your crusade—a crusade that will give you a life of disappointment and complaint because you can never achieve enough. Or, you can ask for the mercy to see the giver of life, who is with you. And once you’ve come to see that, you become so thankful for the unfolding surprises. It’s your choice. But be clear that you are choosing between a life of complaint or gratitude.

Benediction: I am not sure that there is a measure of spirituality but if there is, then gratitude would be it. Gratitude demonstrates that you are paying attention.