

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson
Proper 25 Year B

The voices of the crowd are all familiar to him. These are the same utterances he hears nearly every day. Bantering, or arguing or talking about the fruit that was available at the market that week. Generally nonsense. Nothing terribly important, no startling news, just the crumbs of conversation, thrown his way, not really intended for him.

Then there are the footsteps. Familiar footsteps. They tell him everything. Whether they are shuffling along in the dirt, or stomping at a fast pace, he can tell whether they will stop, see his plea, and throw something meager toward his outstretched hand.

As he waits for a response, any response, he wonders about a lot.

He wonders why no one ever places the coin directly in his outstretched hand, for they see his hands every day. What are they afraid of? For every morning, as the sun glides above the horizon, he gropes his way to his very own spot by the gate, the mark in the ground worn smooth by his body, a discernible spot where he settles into his position for the day, his position of utter humility, of quiet desperation, of complete resignation, crouching in what we would call the child pose in the yoga tradition, with his forehead touching the dust, his meager weight being thrust back on his legs, and his spine curved like the stretched back of a cat.

His forehead was settled into the dust to shield the passers-by from the sight of his eyes, which returned no sight, the sockets that contain his blindness.

He wonders why the older gentlemen next to him, his companion in poverty, whose breathing becomes more labored as the weeks pass by and his gait becomes a bit more unsteady as he locates his spot among the line of beggars, he wonders why that older man isn't given as much as he is. He wonders when he becomes that man's age, will the meager provisions he receives be adequate? Will he have enough? He knows he wants to share the coins thrown on his cloak and give some to this man, so that person can have life and have it more abundantly. But he remembers the reaction of his father the first time he did that, and he was told never to do that again.

He is frustrated because he always wishes he could do more, contribute more, and yet he was told this was all he was good for; this is all he could ever remember, his parents bringing him to the gate to stretch out his hands and gather up anything tossed his way. His family fears something.

Perhaps this fear was birthed within the family, when he was.

He remembers fragments of stories his mother told him while holding him on her lap, stories of the rabbi stopping by to console her at the birth of her deformed and defective son; the rabbi's dilemma of shunning him from the temple, from the holy of holies, due to

his sinfulness, manifested in his blindness. He can remember his mother's tears flowing down her cheek and onto his soft little hand as he reached up to comfort her, as she tried to explain that this was God's disfavor upon the family.

He believed all his life he would never be good enough; he could never be worthy; he would always be considered unclean, for he was born differently; somehow, mysteriously, sin had crept in during his conception; and he was doomed to a life of no importance, for his deficit of sight. No one ever paid attention to him and this is what he grown to expect.

One morning, as he trudges his way to his usual spot, something is tingling in the air. An electricity of sorts. Kind of like that feeling before a big storm comes. Is rain expected, he wonders?

He quickens his pace, an eagerness forms in his chest, and his breathing becomes a bit more rapid. As he lays out his cloak, smoothing the wrinkles, the way he has hundreds of times before, he pauses before he crouches to the ground, for there are many unfamiliar footsteps approaching. There is laughter and joy, something he hardly recognizes, but intuitively knows is good. Many people are talking, all at the same time, but one voice stands out; one voice which seems to be the source of the electricity, the excitement; one voice he yearns to hear, ever more clearly; the one voice, which resonates deep within his soul.

Then he hears the words, which shake his very being: "It's Jesus of Nazareth!" Oh, he'd heard that name before. Oh he'd heard how he healed someone else blind, over at Bathsaida.

And before he can even think, the naked desire within him to be healed takes over his whole being and he blurts out the words, which change his life: "Oh Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He isn't even sure what he is asking for or why he calls Jesus the Son of David. Where do these words even come from?

He lets his whole being fall into what his heart is telling him was true – Jesus, the messiah, is here to heal.

But wait a minute. Something odd happens that in that instant he wonders about. The crowd betrays him. The people who had been throwing the meager coins his way, upon whom he relied for his livelihood, are pushing him away from Jesus. He hears their murmurings, with familiar and stinging words like unworthy, unclean, unimportant. They violently shout at him to leave Jesus alone. They taunt him. They scare him.

Chaos breaks out, and something is released. Bartimaeus keenly hears the shouts of joy and the movement of the feet dancing in harmony with that voice, that one voice which still echoes in his soul. This burgeoning sensation of jubilation slashes through the harsh words that are still ringing in his ears, and a peace comes over him.

Deep inside, he finds a strength he could never have imagined. He yells out in desperation, exhilaration and in passion, and declares, “Oh Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” and in that moment, he offers himself, his soul and his body, to a life following Jesus.

Jesus stands still and says to the crowd, “Call him here”.

Oh heaven, oh pure delight! Bartimeus thinks, Jesus does see me; Jesus does want me; Jesus is for even me, born a sinner.

The crowd obeys Jesus’ instructions; the same crowd who pushed him away, now brings him near.

And then the miracle happens. Something changes in the people in the crowd. There’s a weightlessness to their step. There’s a warmth in their hearts. There’s an openness in their souls. In those simple words, “Call him here”, a light enters the world that they now can see. They gather the other beggars, even the older man, whose breathing had gotten heavier in the past weeks and whose gait a bit more unsteady, and they bring them all to Jesus.

Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And his life changes.

He knows his place is no longer on the side of the road, but wherever Jesus is going, even to the cross in Jerusalem.

Jesus stands still and says, “Call him here” and lives change.

Jesus stands still and says, “Call her here” to you who are bullied, to you who are abused; to you who are left behind; to who you are encouraged to feel not good enough;

Jesus stands still and says, “Call him here”, to you who are overwhelmed; to you who are sitting on the side of the road, watching life go by without you.

Jesus stands still and says, “Call them here” to you who push others aside; to you who look the other way when injustice is right in front of you; to you who toss a coin to the hungry person on the street and dare not look at the larger issues causing this person’s poverty; to you who have grown tired and weary at watching the news and having your heart broken and have learned to shut it all out all. Jesus stands still and says, “Call him here.”, to you.

Jesus stands still and says, “Call her here” to you who feel worthless; to you who feel ashamed; to you who feel the distance between the pew you sit in and the altar, where the living presence of Christ is offered, is too great a space to traverse, because of your sinfulness; to you who have a heavy heart or a burden which feels too great to carry; Jesus stands still and says, “Call him here”, to you.

So how is it for you? Do you have the courage to shout out like Bartimaeus, “O Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me”? Or do you have the strength to rely on others to bring you into that place of utter humility, quiet desperation, and complete resignation to the mercy and grace of God? Or do you have the sight of the crowd to bring those in need of healing to Jesus, so we may follow Jesus together, even to the cross?

When Jesus stands still and says, “Call him or her here”, I urge you to hear and respond to this holy invitation.

Amen.