

MARK 10:46-52
SOMETHING TO SHOUT ABOUT

What do you have to shout about? When did you last have something to shout about? Have you ever had something to shout about? Maybe you're not a "shouting-about-something" person; you prefer to keep your counsel to yourself and be quiet about life! Maybe you think that shouting is only for football matches and you're not even sure you would shout then! Is there something about the world that you want to shout about to change it? If you won't shout, what do you make of people who do? Would you rather they kept quiet, because they are too enthusiastic or too troublesome? They are shaking the tree and you're not too comfortable with people who shake the tree? Do you have something to shout about?

The story of Bartimaeus has a bit of shouting in it; I'm not sure that all of it is good shouting and at the centre stands Jesus, listening, then healing. This is the last healing miracle in Mark's gospel; Jesus is heading to Jerusalem and the next episode is Palm Sunday and now he is passing through Jericho on His way to Jerusalem. Mark tells us about the beggar at the side of the road; this is the same trip, the same place as Jesus met Zaccheus and Jesus has just "healed" Zaccheus; now He is heading out of town on His way to Jerusalem and the crowd comes across this not uncommon sight of a beggar sitting at the side of the road, waiting for someone to put some money in his hat! Bartimaeus is blind, so he doesn't see what's coming, but he hears the commotion; he has heard also that it is Jesus who is coming and so he shouts out; then some in the crowd shout; then there is a second shout from the crowd and finally Bartimaeus is healed and follows Jesus; does he finish with shout of delight? We can imagine that he might!

Bartimaeus shouts to Jesus: "*Jesus, Son...*" (Mark 10:47) He has heard of Jesus and what Jesus has done for other people in need; this might be his one chance to see; he is not prepared to let the chance go by; so he shouts to attract Jesus' attention. "Mercy" is one of these Bible words that can mean so many different things, but here is it simply a cry for help. "Be kind to me; help me in my need!" He needs to shout over the commotion of the crowd in order to be heard; a whisper would not have been heard; he shouts to get Jesus' attention and it works. "*Call him!*" (Mark 10:49) says Jesus and Bartimaeus is brought to what might seem a strange conversation: "*What do...*" (Mark 10:51) Did Jesus not know everything about Bartimaeus; did He not know that Bartimaeus was blind? But here is Bartimaeus having to put his need into words – "*Rabbi, I...*" (Mark 10:51) He puts into words what he needs, where his weakness lies and Jesus heals him. "*Go, your...*" (Mark 10:52) Faith is rewarded; his shout has been answered and he follows Jesus with a spring in his step, delighted, singing, seeing everything for the first time, rejoicing in Jesus and His love.

This is one example of Jesus helping someone in need, healing a blind man; these are signs and pointers to the power that Jesus has to help and save the world. Days after he had healed Bartimaeus, Jesus would go to the cross and die and then on the third day be raised. The preacher in the sermon to the Hebrews takes these events and helps us understand what they mean for us. "*Therefore He...*" (Hebrews 7:25) Three little words: "He is able..." encapsulate what Mark is trying to tell people when he writes his gospel and tells these stories of Jesus; "see what Jesus can do; He can make blind people see; Jesus is a great Saviour who is able to bring mercy and grace into every human life!" The preacher in Hebrews tells us that Jesus is able to save and save totally and completely; there is nothing faulty about Jesus' work; there is nothing short about Jesus' work; He is totally able to save us, to forgive our sins, to make us new people, and to bring the blessing of God into our lives; there is nothing missing.

The proper response to the sense of "Jesus is able" is faith. "*Go, your...*" (Mark 10:52) Faith connected Bartimaeus to Jesus so that Jesus' mercy and power changed Bartimaeus' life, healed him, and made him a new man. Faith connects us to Jesus so that the same mercy and the same power can touch our lives and bring salvation to us. Faith is both a gift from God

and our personal response to Jesus. A friend of mine from the USA, but who visited Edinburgh when I was student, which is where we met, spoke of her being brought up in the Christian faith, but spoke of her time in Edinburgh as the time when she learned to say “yes” to Jesus in her own voice; faith became her response, something personal rather than something she inherited from her parents. I love that notion; saying “yes” to Jesus in our own voice and that is proper response to Jesus who “*is able...*” (*Hebrews 7:25*)

People are still coming to Jesus looking for mercy; we are still looking for mercy and Jesus is the only place we can go to find mercy from God. Some will tell you that the church is dead or irrelevant and that people are not interested in religion any more. Well, that may be true; but people still need mercy and grace and salvation and the Spirit of God is still at work drawing people to Jesus. Jesus is still able and people are still coming to Him across the world, and are still finding that He gives them mercy and grace in times of need. He is still able to save us and He is still able to save everyone and anyone who comes to Him. People are still discovering this for themselves and faith is still being born in hearts and minds the world over.

There are two more voices, shouting in this story. We might need to decide which voice would be our voice. They are both crowd voices! The first crowd voice is their first reaction to Bartimaeus’ cry for help. “*Many rebuked...*” (*Mark 10:48*) Did they see him as a nuisance, an interruption to their conversation, an inconvenience, someone in whom they decided Jesus would not be interested? So they told him to go away; “don’t bother the teacher!” The Church finds so many different ways to turn people away from Christian faith: preachers who lambast their Christmas audiences by telling them off for only coming to Church at Christmas; the subliminal message that we give off to people because they are different from us and that because they are different they don’t belong; we sometimes give the impression that faith doesn’t matter much to us, so others pick up the message that they shouldn’t bother themselves too much trying to find faith. It is a wonder that the church is still here at all because we find so many ways of putting people off and creating barriers.

But there is a second crowd voice: “*Cheer up...*” (*Mark 10:49*) Here’s a different voice from the crowd; here is the crowd encouraging, being the door for Bartimaeus to come to Jesus; here are people who point him to Jesus, who draw him in, who lead him to the One who will change his life forever. What a great picture of the Church that is! We know the One who is able to save and so we want others to find Him too; we know where to find grace and mercy and we want to share that good news with other people, and help others find the blessing of God that we enjoy. Here is something to shout about, the good news that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and the mission of God is to share that good news with people across the world and next door. Our job is to join in with that mission and be the door, the channel, or whatever other picture you want to have, the people through whom God draws people to Himself. We draw people by our love, by our grace to them, by our kindness, by our friendliness, by our willingness to accept them warts and all. Can we be the voice for people in our world who are struggling to be heard, who maybe have no voice of their own? Can we pray for people in need, and bring them to God? Can we campaign for a better world, and use our voice to speak for the poor?

Bartimaeus has something to shout about: Jesus just changed his life; He gave him the ability to see. The crowd has something to shout about: they just witnessed the grace and power of God at work in Jesus and they rejoice that some of them at least had a part in it. Maybe some in the crowd went away complaining because this was an intrusion, an interruption and quite unnecessary. We have something to shout about: Jesus “*is able...*” (*Hebrews 7:25*) this is good news for sharing, open to everyone, for anyone who wants it to share in it. It is ours: we can say “yes” to Jesus in our own voice; we can encourage others to say “yes” to Jesus in their own voice; faith is the proper response. Here is something to shout about, even if your preference is to shout quietly!