



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 22

October 24, 2021

We Are Beggars, This Is True

Mark 10:46–52

⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” ⁵⁰ And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” ⁵² And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

While few men have written more or had more written about them than Martin Luther, there is surprisingly little written about the last days of his life. One of the few items of note comes from a scrap of paper his friends found in his coat pocket. In this note he had written two short phrases, the first in Latin, the second in German: “Hoc est verum. Wir sind alle Bettler.” “This is true. We are all beggars.” What had this man – whom God had chosen as his special instrument to reform the Church; this German monk – through whom God had brought the mighty church of Rome to its knees; this pastor – to whom God had granted extraordinary gifts to translate, interpret, communicate, and rightly divide the Word of truth – what had he concluded after a lifetime full of accomplishment? That he – and all of us – are nothing more than beggars before a holy and gracious God; that we can do nothing but cry to Jesus, receive His gifts, and joyfully follow Him.

It was just days before Holy Week, days before Jesus would march into Jerusalem to shouts of “hosanna” and be led out to cries of “crucify him!” Mark continues his narrative with Jesus passing through Jericho, a city roughly 15 miles from Jerusalem. As He and His disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus – that is, the Son of Timaeus – was sitting by the roadside, begging. Partially due to poor hygiene and unsanitary conditions, partly due to a superstitious rejection of sound medical advice, blindness was a terribly common thing in Jesus’ day. Blindness is a sad affliction in any age, but it was especially so in 1st century Israel. There were no guide dogs, no talking traffic signals, no specialized schools or homes or services. There was no braille enabling blind persons to read. And, because no one would hire them for work, they were almost invariably left to beg for their daily bread. To add insult to injury, the blind also lived under the social stigma that their blindness was God’s punishment for some sin that either they or their ancestors had committed (John 9:1-2). These were the



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conditions under which Bartimaeus lived. And he may have been blind, but he suffered no delusions; he knew he was completely dependent on the mercy of others for his very life.

But, as blind as Bartimaeus was, there was one thing that, by God's grace, he could see more clearly than many who had perfect vision. He was unable to work, unable to get to the temple by himself to present sacrifices, but his ears worked just fine . . . and he used them. And what he had heard was a lot discussion about a man named Jesus of Nazareth, who had traveled throughout the country preaching a message of God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness for sinners, and performing miracles of healing the likes of which no one had ever seen before. And, while many people saw in this Jesus nothing more than the son of Joseph and Mary, Bartimaeus saw the promised Messiah, the Son of God promised to King David 1000 years earlier, who would establish God's kingdom on earth and rescue His people from the misery of sin (2 Sam. 7:11-16). Because Bartimaeus believed that this was the one man in all the world who could help him, when he heard that Jesus was passing that way, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

You can learn a lot from a blind beggar. First, while our world is convinced that seeing is believing, Bartimaeus turned this on its head: believing is seeing! Just think – at least some of the people in that crowd had probably seen Jesus' miracles with their own eyes – and we know for certain that many of the Jewish leaders who crucified Jesus did – but they still didn't believe that He was the Son of God, the promised Savior. Faith doesn't come from *seeing*; faith comes from *hearing* the message of Christ (Rom. 10:17) – even today. In the absolution, I can't show you the list of your sins that have been washed away by Jesus' blood; you can only hear and trust Jesus' own promise in John 20: "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven" (John 20:23). In Baptism, to our eyes nothing more dramatic happens than someone getting a little wet. But Scripture declares that the impossible happens in that washing: "Baptism now saves you" (1 Pet. 3:21). The bread and wine you receive in the Lord's Supper look, feel, taste, and smell like normal bread and wine, but don't believe your eyes, believe Jesus' words: "This is my body . . . this is my blood . . . given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins" (Mat. 26:26, 28). Many demand to see proof before they'll believe in Jesus . . . and they'll be waiting all the way to Judgment Day, when the only thing they'll see is the wrath of God at their unbelief. Beloved, let us learn from Bartimaeus: *hearing* is believing and believing is *seeing*.

Secondly, whether we want to admit it or not, we're all like Bartimaeus; we're all beggars before God, completely helpless and unable to save ourselves (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 3:10). We were conceived and born without true fear or faith in God; dead in sin, blind to the Gospel, enemies of God. Left to ourselves, we could never obey the least of God's commandments, much less obey all of them to the perfect standards He demands. We are miserable beggars before God who can do nothing but cry for mercy – which is why it's no coincidence that one of the first things we do in the Divine Service each week is confess our sins and receive Absolution, reminding us that we are beggars, reminding us who is



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serving whom here. I'll give you a hint: we don't come here to serve God; we come here to be served by Jesus!

Bartimaeus believed that he needed Jesus to serve him, and so he ignored the crowd's attempts to silence him and shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! Get on your feet! He's calling you." You might think that Jesus would have better things to do, people to see, preparations to make, as he walked the lonely road to the cross than to be bothered with a miserable, blind beggar. In times of suffering and weakness we often think that Jesus has better things to do than to concern Himself with us and our problems. We might think we shouldn't bother Him – that He must be too busy taking care of the great, big, important problems and people in the world. But, you know what? We'd be wrong. There's no problem too big and no believer too small for Jesus – because He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to hear and help beggars – beggars like Bartimaeus and beggars like you and me.

Bartimaeus didn't waste any time. Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. That cloak was quite possibly Bartimaeus' only earthly possession. It was the roof over his head and the mattress under his back, it was his shade tree and his pantry. And yet, at Jesus' invitation, he threw it aside to run to Jesus whom he believed could give him everything he needed and more. He would let nothing keep him from Jesus.

Dear friend, is there something hindering you? You know, we too have a standing invitation from Jesus: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Mat. 11:30). Is pride getting in your way? "I can handle this myself. I don't need God." Is it embarrassment? "I shouldn't have to ask for help. I should be stronger than this." Is it doubt or unbelief? "Not even God can help me out of this." Or maybe it's guilt or shame. "Jesus knows what I've done, what I've said, what I've thought. Why in heaven's name would He want to help a miserable sinner like me?" Whatever it is, beloved, remember this: coming to Jesus for help is not about you, your worthiness, or unworthiness; it's about Him – His mercy, His power, His promises, His love. Remember: we're all beggars with nothing to offer, and everything to ask – and Jesus welcomes beggars.

Here's the proof: "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." Think about the guts it took to make that request. Bartimaeus wasn't asking for a ride, for beer money, or food – he was asking for the impossible. But he was convinced that this was God's Son standing before him – the Son of David that God promised would come specifically to open eyes that are blind and release those who sit in darkness [Is. 42:7]. Jesus answered Bartimaeus' bold and impossible request, saying, "Go your way, your faith has healed you." And immediately he received his sight. Jesus gave Bartimaeus an impossible gift: his sight.

Why? The actual wording that Jesus used here was: "Your faith has *saved* you." How? Through self-actualization? "If you believe it, you can achieve it?" No. By leading



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him to the Only one who could actually heal him. Bartimaeus' faith was nothing more (and nothing less) than a beggar's open hand – receiving the gift Jesus would graciously give. Bartimaeus' faith saved him because it led him to beg from the right person. Saving, healing, justifying faith doesn't "do" anything; it simply receives what Jesus freely gives.

And Bartimaeus' faith didn't stop there; he followed Jesus along the road. Remember: this is just days before Holy Week. Jesus' road is leading Him to Jerusalem, to the hornet's nest of those who wanted Him dead – a fact of which Bartimaeus was undoubtedly aware. Jesus' road was leading to the cross, to suffering and pain and persecution – not only for Jesus but for all who were bold enough to follow Him and confess His name. But Bartimaeus did it – because even though he would no longer have to beg for his daily bread – he still needed Jesus to suffer and die for his sins; he was still a *spiritual* beggar, he still needed what only Jesus could give him.

Sadly, that's a lesson that so many people forget. There are people in every age who behave more like the nine lepers in Luke 17 who, once they get what they want from Jesus, turn their backs on Him and walk away. Beloved, let us never forget that after we've come to Jesus in our time of need, after He has answered our cry for mercy, after He has assured us that our sins are forgiven and heaven is ours – we're still, *and will always be* beggars. We never outgrow our begging Jesus to provide everything from clothing and food to forgiveness and salvation. From the day we were brought to the font as helpless infants to the day we take our last breath – we remain beggars who must rely fully on Jesus' mercy. But here's the good news: Jesus' invitation to receive His gifts still stands! Even though we won't see Him walking by on the street, He yet promises to meet us – right here, where His Word is proclaimed and His Sacrament is distributed. This is why we come to church: *this* is where beggars like us come to receive the gifts Jesus freely gives – and receiving those gifts gratefully and faithfully is how we joyfully follow Him.

Luther was right. "We *are* all beggars." Beggars who can do nothing but cry to Jesus for mercy, receive what He wants to give, and joyfully follow Him all the way to eternal life. Thank God, Jesus has time and mercy in abundance for beggars like us. In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen