

Can't Keep Quiet

Menno Mennonite Church
Sunday October 27, 2024

Purpose: To consider the invitation of living the work of discipleship includes that which we might just as soon ignore.

Message: Jesus reaches out to all who wish to follow and know life with the work of faith.

Scripture: Mark 10:46-52 (I will read); Hebrews 7:23-28 (Please read)

Synopsis: When the offer of Jesus' salvation is around, there are always people whose interest is caught. Those who are around and beside the coming of what is happen see a hear what is going on and are brought in. Sometimes they are not the folks for whom those who are in the know are looking to come to Jesus. They occasionally come in the wrong way, striking the wrong chords, and causing uncomfortable encounters along the way. It can be a familiar role to be among the disciples looking (again) for the one making the ruckus to quiet down and stop looking for Jesus' healing. It can become frustrating when we are confronted with Jesus' inclination to stop, listen and know what he can do for those who call upon him.

But as with the children who he bid come, Jesus is always prepared to hear and know how the kingdom can expand time and again. We are invited to follow his lead and do the same.

Mark 10:46–52

⁴⁶ They came to Jericho.

As Jesus 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.

Getting used to the way we do things in a congregation, it is easy to take some things for granted. The language, pace, and tone of a group at worship has its own pace, nature, and even smell. Most of the time no one particularly designs things this way—at least when you are moving within our free church tradition. It is more a function of the culture and traditions that get built up over the years of life together, latching onto the things that make sense, sounds right, or just “the way its done”. It is often the very things that we take for granted as completely and utterly normal that are often most telling of the nature and tenor of a congregation’s—for lack of a better word—vibe. Even something as relatively normal as congregational sharing—part of our tradition for quite some time so far as I am aware—is something that is unique to the experience of a smaller church (this is hard to accomplish with hundreds in the pews) as well as Anabaptist tradition in general. It has to be said: this is not something that you find with frequency outside our tradition. It is a thing that you do as a community. Whether it is your favorite part of the service or not, it is worth knowing it is somewhat distinctively ours.

Which is not to say that it is without its pitfalls. I love Menno’s sharing—it suits us and fits well who and how we are. You won’t hear me speaking against it. Every congregation has its own style and substance to the practice—one of those things that grows with a congregation. Jubilee, the last congregation that I led had its own vibrant tradition to work with. With no education hour to consider there was a license to share broadly and completely, with sharing time sometimes outlasting the sermon for length. There was a passion for it with several speakers lining up. They come by it honestly: a urban congregation there are a number of members with abiding roots in and from the world of 12 step programs where sharing is often the primary program far more than any one person and what they have to say. But the emphasis does have its problems. There we some members who, you knew--when they held up their hand for microphone to speak of what the Lord had done for them that week—you knew that you were simply not going to make it lunch on time, and a little bit of you just groaned inside. As a leader finding a way to welcome the sharer for what they are offering as well as to let them know that they might want to wrap things up after their first 10 or so minutes, despite asking people to respect the body by considering what they had to say and how often they said it, let’s just say it was a challenge. I occasionally found myself wanting some play-off music like they have for Oscars. Despite it all, it was an element that just suits who and what that body is and something that I grew to love, warts and all.

I think this is somewhat of what we have going on here with our passage from Mark this morning. The crowd—the circle of those following Jesus from place to place and town to town—was on a roll. The way was set and Jesus was making his way at long last to Jerusalem. It is this crowd that had been alongside Jesus and the core disciples for quite some time now and were part of the procession with Jesus. They were part of the movement of Jesus and the entourage of those who were following on. As such they were part of this good thing going and they were in and on the way toward their destination. The very next event in the narrative for Mark in his going from place to place is the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, so perhaps there were even more coming along on this particular important occasion. At any rate, it is here that they encounter Bartimeus sitting beside the road yelling for attention. You can almost see their shushing and arm flapping to make the beggar be quiet and appreciate that it just isn't the right time. Like the ill-timed sharers, his interruption might not be welcome.

They think that Jesus is their business. Like the disciples who were eager to shunt the children away when they came to the teacher, the crowd here didn't want this time waster to interfere with the important work of what was going on here. Theirs was the agenda of getting on down the road with the messianic agenda to reckon with. Jesus' agenda was, as always, subject to the needs of the beloved ones who came along the way. Just as he did with the disciples and the little children Jesus is the one who stops and wants to connect with that which was deemed unimportant and an interruption. The whole procession stops, stands still and insists the man be brought to him. Given his chance Bartimeus throws off his cloak (likely among the few of his possessions), perhaps scattering the coins he collected along the way—harkening toward that which the rich young ruler was not able to do, but a faith filled response of many along the way of the disciples (think Simeon and Andrew leaving their nets, James and John their boat and others as they are called). He asks for what all those around Jesus was actually in need of—for the gift of sight—sight enough to see Jesus for the savior that he ultimately and actively is. Given what he needs Jesus tells him to go and that his faith has made him well. His faith that led him to advocate for himself, his faith that led him to use his voice when others tried to silence and devalue him. His faith that brought him to the presence of Jesus with an audience of those who thought they were better.

That is the challenge, always to Jesus. In sitting with these verses I find myself more than a bit sympathetic to the notions of the crowds here, They were on the move. They were

headed someplace with pride and purpose and they wanted to see what is going to happen when the Messiah comes at long last to the seat of power. We, like them, sometimes can get so tied into the stuff that we do that makes our following what it is and makes us who we are that we might just find our patience pushed from time to time by that which gets in the way. There might be the distracting persons that seeming derail the way things ought to be and how we expect to proceed. Sometimes we know that there are those people who we would just as soon the master would pay no notice of in the world, those that we wish we could claim the entitlement to write off as undeserving of our love, our charity, our attention. There are times where we would rather keep the way things are well beyond question than allow the Christ within us complicate the picture by listening to his voice and seeing faith where we don't expect to see it. It is the Bartimeus' of life that call us ever to wonder carefully, always, about where and how we encounter the Jesus along the way and how we ourselves are changed by the encounter.

I grew up going to church conventions. I remember the powerful speakers, times of personal commitment, even times of being called to task for daring to actually dance in the aisle while singing (that was back in the days before we had conga lines making their way around the youth assembly). But I will readily say that the most powerful experiences that I had at denominational conferences was never on the program. It was usually along the sides of the conference. During college I, the communication major I was, often was staff at the conferences. At that time it was when we would take the news and the pictures of the day and produce overnight a 6-8 page newspaper that would be printed and ready to hand out as our conference goers came through the doors on the way to breakfast in the morning. I became familiar with the behind the scenes of the event and spent way too many nights catching naps beneath folding tables because it was just too much trouble to go to the hotel for a couple hours sleep.

Being up all night in an empty conference center brought you in touch with people you wouldn't normally get to know. It was often the security guards and janitors who were there to keep an eye on us and had the hours to while away that would sit and ask questions of us about this weird thing called Mennonite faith. I remember one very well, despite losing his name along the way. A self-identified Muslim and an African American, he had a lot of questions about history and peoplehood in this Christian group. He asked about Anabaptist history and Slavery. And I answered him as honestly as I could, afforded a rare opportunity to speak across boundaries to share was important to both of us. It was one of those times when the folks along

the edges become even more the tools of the Spirit that we might ever expect. We had a connection—not to convince one another or to save each other—but to hear and see and know, and that is good.

I wonder how often we find ourselves filtering that which we expect to hear with Jesus in our crowd, and miss the voices that we would rather hush and quiet? There will always be those who we are not ready to hear from—inside our spheres and out. But often those are precisely who Jesus welcomes, hearing and knowing, granting what they need and inviting them to follow. At the same time we are invited to witness God’s love and to be changed and given new sight of what God just might be up to.

May we be given the faith of Bartimeus when we need it—emboldened to cry to the one who hears. And may we ever be drawn to those to whom Christ is drawn, knowing that in Christ, healing abounds. And that is something that will change us, move us, and shape us, and around which we can never keep quiet.

May we be drawn to those who witness to God’s love in what ever guise we may find them. Amen.