

LISTEN TO GO

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Mark 10:46-52

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Bartimaeus has long been known as one of the most insightful blind people of all time. His ability to see Jesus' miraculous powers and God-given gifts at a time when few others recognized how important Jesus truly was reminds me a little of Beethoven's ability to hear beautiful music in his head even when his ears had long betrayed him to deafness. But, how does a blind beggar come to such sight? How does a deaf composer hear so deeply he can continue composing beautiful music? Listening deeply, more deeply than ears can hear. Seeing beyond the eyes can perceive. That's what made Bartimaeus different from the many others who encountered Jesus. That's how a blind beggar could get up and go immediately when Jesus healed him and invited him to follow in faith.

But this isn't just a faith story. This is a listening story. This is a seeing story. This is story of patience and perseverance, because that type of seeing and hearing takes time. The disciples were busy. Jesus had places to go, things to do. They were simply trying to get Jesus on to the next destination. They on their way to yet another town, and some beggar along the roadside wants to stop the entire caravan of people in order to be healed by Jesus. Even the crowd seems impatient with the delay. "Be quiet," they say to the blind beggar. They didn't want to hear him. They didn't want Jesus to see him. Everyone wanted to get to the next place. Except for Bartimaeus, who was just sitting there in the middle of the road begging to see Jesus. Crying out for Jesus. Insisting he be seen and heard by Jesus.

And Jesus stops everything and takes time to listen. Once again, Jesus stops everything else to attend to a request that others thought was not worth his time. He goes to the side of that

road, the dirty ditch, where a man named Bartimaeus is begging for help. “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks. Not a question we easily know the answer to. But Bartimaeus had been calling out to be seen and begging for too long to be heard. He was ready – ready for something different, ready to listen, ready to think about new possibilities. And so he responded, “My teacher, let me see again.”

And so Jesus does. From listening to one another, from seeing one another beyond what the eyes could show, Jesus and Bartimaeus create the healing Bartimaeus most needs in order to see again. But the conversation isn’t over. The healing is just the beginning. After healing Bartimaeus, Jesus says, “**Go**, your faith has made you well.” And because Bartimaeus has taken the time to listen, he does just that.

How often Jesus gives this advice to those he has met or taught or healed. “Go,” “Go and sin no more.” “Follow me.” “Go into all the world.” “Go and tell no one.” Notice Jesus doesn’t give any specific instructions. Jesus almost never says precisely where to go. There aren’t many quotes like: “Go to Jerusalem,” or “Follow me to the nearest town.” Most often, Jesus just says, “Go!”

Reminding me of an experience one of our church family had last winter. Joanne Reynolds. It was a challenging time when the pastor had resigned unexpectedly last February. Leadership needs were critical, and some were stepping down from previous covenant commitments. Meanwhile, others were praying and wondering what their roles should be in helping the church. Joanne, who had been a faithful choir member but also enjoying her retirement freedom, had a sense in her prayer life that God needed her to step up. She knew there was a vacancy in the Moderator position, so she assumed that was where God needed her.

Unbeknownst to her, the Trustee chairperson Jamie Christiano had a strong sense that God needed him to be Moderator during the transition time. After Joanne and Jamie talked, she went back to God in prayer, asking “What would you have me do.” And the answer came, crystal clear: “Serve!” Well, crystal clear with no specifics. But in that general answer, Joanne felt the freedom to say, “Oh, I could chair Trustees so can Jamie can serve as Moderator, where he has a strong sense of call.” And so, serve she has done and is doing. No one wrote it across the sky. No specifics in the direction she was to go: Just “Serve.”

When I asked Joanne if I could share her story, she affirmed I could and then offered these words to us: “Perhaps it would be helpful to my brothers and sisters to get a sense of what Spirit’s call can sometimes sound like. When you think about it, that wasn’t very specific. I’m a spread sheet person—I want detail. But often in my life Spirit has been pretty general like that, maybe just indicating a direction without giving the full—and detailed— itinerary. And that general direction is enough to get me where I needed to go as long as I trust in that.”

But the only way she gets that general direction is if she first listens. Only because she took time to pray, to reflect, to quiet her own worries and concerns, was she able to listen for what nudges Spirit was sending her way. And when she listened, she recognized that her call was simply to “serve.”

As the call to Bartimaeus was simply to "Get up and go."

Jesus is always inviting followers to join him on the journey, the journey, not the destination. Even when he talks about a destination, he only talks in generalities about following him to the cross, following God on the path of sacrificial, self-giving love. But it’s still a path, not a destination. A journey, not an end goal, because ultimately, the journey is more important

than the destination. A lot of people get confused about this, particularly in Christianity. So many people seem to think that the end goal of being a Christian is getting to heaven or being saved or being the ones who actually make it in the end times – if there is such a thing.

But when people asked Jesus about the end times and when they would come, Jesus says repeatedly, “Don’t worry about it or try to figure it out. Live your faith now.” “Go! “Get on the journey.” When people want to know how to get to heaven or inherit eternal life, Jesus doesn’t talk about golden streets or beautiful mansions, he talks about loving your neighbor *here and now*. When people want to know how to inherit the kingdom, Jesus says “the kingdom of God is amongst you.” “The kingdom is in your midst.” It’s all about the journey with God, right here, right now. But if we’re focused on "heaven" as some sort of ultimate goal, we can easily miss the journey of growing faith and love – which is actually the ultimate goal. If we turn Christianity into the crass message: "Be good so we can all get to heaven," we lose sight of Christ and Christ’s teachings.

For Jesus, it’s all about relationships: Relationships of love--Relationship with God, relationship with humanity, relationship with ourselves. When we find ourselves separated from God or separated from others, we find ourselves on a very lonely journey. But Jesus invites us onto a journey filled with the companionship of God and the companionship of our sisters and brothers on this earth. On this journey, we don’t have to wait for heaven to experience God's love. We get that love right here, right now. On this journey, we don’t have to wait to bring God’s kingdom to this earth. We get to offer our ministry and our service to share a bit of God’s kingdom with others right here and right now. And in the listening, we can discover what that ministry and service might look like. That’s what we mean when we talk about vocatio around

here. That's what we mean when we talk about serving where you're called. It means listening and discovering where to go, what sort of journey to travel, how to be and what to do on that journey.

For someone like Rodger, he'll be making music on that journey. For someone like Joanne, she'll be leading others and overseeing administrative needs on that journey. For you, it might mean being a companion for lonely people. Or, it might mean teaching children or supporting teenagers on their faith journeys. It might mean sharing your administrative gifts as a Trustee, or your IT gifts as part of the Tech Team. It might mean offering your joy to situations or sorrow and despair. It might mean offering your gifts of hospitality as part of the Fellowship Team or even just hosting Fellowship a few Sundays a year. Or your gift of hospitality might mean welcoming neighbors to your home or inviting friends to a social event at church. Listen. Where are you gifted? How do you like to travel on this journey of life and faith? What do you sense you are called to do along that journey? Who do you sense you are called to be on that journey? Are you a leader, or a helper? A teacher, or a learner? Is your mode of being a prayerful mode on the journey, a quiet companion, listening for God and praying for your church and church family along the way? Or are you more of an encourager along the way, cheering others along and helping them to keep going? Or are you more of a thinker, reflecting on the journey and asking curious questions to help others think along the way?

Listen, and you may discover new things about yourself. You may recognize new ways of hearing God's call and answering in your own unique way.

Yes, we need to get up and go. But not to any specific destination. We need to get up and go to any place that needs our love, to any friend that needs our help, to any stranger that

needs our smile, to any child that needs our guidance, to any ministry that needs our service. For this journey of following God promises that we can be in ministry any time, any place, no matter what! For any time, any place, no matter what, God is on this journey with us. Christ is showing us the way, and the Spirit is flowing through our lives.

Bartimaeus can help us to remember that it's the journey, the road with Jesus, that is worthwhile in and of itself... not the destination. If we can't enjoy the journey, the destination is likely to be very disappointing. Even our specific ministries are meant to be journeys. If we get so caught up in our next ministry destination... whether it be a church meeting, a lesson plan to be completed, a meal to be prepared, or a worship service to be planned... that we forget to pay attention to the journey, we're likely to miss the joy of being in ministry any place, any time, with anyone, no matter what. It's the surprises of ministry that can make it fun and exciting... the journey with God and others will give us plenty of opportunities for ministry, whether we ever sign up for some formalized ministry or not. Any point in our journey with God is just that... a point, one dot on the timeline, one bump in the road, one curve in the path. But it's all part of a lifelong journey, even an eternal journey.

We know that the healing of Bartimaeus' eyes was not the end of his journey. Rather it was a new beginning. When we are healed by God's miraculous presence in our lives, when we experience a saving moment in our faith walk, or when we recognize Christ's call and respond, we are not finished with the journey. We are simply moving forward on the journey. For our journeys with God are continuous, constantly filled with new opportunities and new challenges.

We may sometimes get busy worrying about getting to the next place in our life and forget we're on a journey with God. Or life's struggles may blind us to signs of hope, causing us

to cry out for help. Or, we may be so focused on certain destinations or so confused along the way that we don't even realize we need to cry out for help. God knows this and walks with us still, whispering or silent, ready to speak when we are ready to hear. And God gives us the church... a covenant community of companions for the journey, Christian friends to surround us and encourage us on this journey, companions to pray for us when we can't pray for ourselves, friends to lift us up when we fall, fellow travelers to walk this journey of faith and ministry alongside. Even in the low points and down times, even with twists and turns, doubts and concerns, challenges and difficulties along the way, we are not alone. We have God. We have one another. We can cry out for help, and we will be heard. That's the gift of covenanting together to be the church each year – a commitment to be companions and community for one another, so no one has to travel alone, so we can help one another listen, and help one another recognize when God might be speaking to us.

Let's take time together. Let's listen together. Let's travel together, so we can better enjoy this journey. Let's listen to go, so we can travel with open hearts and minds to God's presence in our lives. Let's listen to go, knowing that Christ walks with us on each step of our journey. Let's listen to go, allowing the Spirit to flow through us so that we remember the destination is in the journey. Where we are going and when we will get there will be clarified and guided by God, as long as we listen. And along the way, the journey itself will transform our lives, bringing us closer to God and closer to one another. So listen up! Listen to go! Listen, for God is speaking today and all days.

Will you join me for a time of listening in silent prayer together?

(Pause)

Lord's Prayer