
Cry Out, Take Heart, and Join The Procession

**A sermon by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
Proper 25 – Year B**

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 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." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 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." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. (Mark 10:46-52

It's one of the first things we do in life. We cry out. I don't quite remember doing it myself; but I sure remember my little brother, born seven years after me, crying out. I remember my own children, as infants, crying out, in the middle of the night. Yes, and during the day, too. Now, I hear my smaller grandchildren, crying out. It's one of the first things we do as human beings.

And as surely as we cry out, there is someone there trying to calm us. "There, there; it's alright." "Here's something to eat, something to drink." "Here's a new diaper." "Here is someone to touch you." "Here is someone to make it better."

But, as we grow older, the people around us don't really try to calm us. They try to shut us up. "Be quiet," we hear. "Can't you see I'm trying to concentrate here?" "Honey, shut the children up; they are really disturbing me tonight!"

Then, we become adults. Sometimes when we cry out as adults, we are merely being our whiny, childish selves. Sometimes, we are simply complaining. There are two types of crying out in this world. The complaining type of crying out, the crying out for selfish comfort, the habitual complaining, is the second kind of crying out, and I will get to that in a few minutes.

There is a first type of crying out, which is actually crying out for good. Some of us learn to cry out for legitimately good reason. There are needs, legitimate needs, in the world. If the people around us are not paying attention, we need to cry out!

Wherever critical movements have emerged in our human civilizations, they have emerged because someone cried out. Martin Luther King, Jr., had the courage to cry out. Witnesses to violence have cried out, like someone in Brunswick, Georgia cried out.

Few of us enjoy complaining. But, crying out can be a good thing. In fact, in the Bible, crying out can be a sign of healthy faith. The most faithful people in the Bible cry out. Moses cries out on behalf of his people. King David cries out in the psalms. The prophets cry out. John the Baptist is a voice crying out in the wilderness.

Our Old Testament lesson this morning was another passage from Job. Who can forget Job? That book can be summarized as forty-two chapters of this kind of thing, crying out. First Job is crying out, and then his so-called friends are trying to comfort him. Over and over again, and the crying out is painful. But in his suffering, and in his pain, and in his crying out, Job is one of the most faithful characters in the Bible.

The New Testament version of Job, is none other than our Lord, Jesus Christ, who suffers innocently, and who also cries out. The great heroes of faith cry out.

But, most of us are not great heroes of the faith. For most of us, it is hard to tell whether we are crying out for good reason, or whether we are merely whining – complaining. Most of us are like Bartimaeus, the hero of our gospel passage for today. People didn't know whether he was merely complaining, or whether he was legitimately crying out.

Bartimaeus was the poor blind soul sitting along the way while Jesus walks by, while everyone else seems to be having a good time. They are eager to be with Jesus and to hear Jesus teach.

But Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, is upsetting the crowd. He keeps interrupting with his illness. We all know such people. We have all heard them. The church seems to be getting along comfortably. Or maybe it's our school. Or the business, the city, the country. Whatever it is, our group is purring along like a fine-tuned motor. But there is one person who is totally blind to it all. He is in the corner, poor and complaining.

And, frankly, his complaining gets on our nerves. He is crying, "Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

It's one thing to ask that. "Lord have mercy" is a deep and common prayer. But when one sits there, day in and day out, complaining the prayer instead of believing the prayer, then it becomes an attitude, a habit of complaint. It becomes the second, negative, kind of crying out.

It becomes a culture of complaint. Bartimaeus was accustomed merely to sit by the road and complain. And everybody else was accustomed to it, too. He would complain, and everyone else would tell him to be quiet. So went the world, back and forth. It was a culture of complaint.

Blind Bartimaeus sure got on the nerves of Jesus' disciples. It is Jesus' disciples who tell the poor man to be quiet! So Bartimaeus cries out even more loudly.

Then, Jesus stops! Jesus says, "Call him here." Something happens when Jesus says that. Suddenly, the attitude of the disciples changes! They had been saying, "Shut up, shut up. Be quiet." But something happens when Jesus stops for blind Bartimaeus.

When Jesus stops to recognize the blind man, the beggar man, the complaining man, the disciples stop complaining, too! In fact, they are transformed. Their attitude changes completely, and they say to the guy, "Hey, get up, take heart. He is calling you."

And the man does get up. He does more than get up. He jumps up! He throws off his cloak. He runs to Jesus.

Right then! Right then, they become a healthy community.

The healthy organization, the healthy church, the healthy community of whatever sort, has the courage to throw off the old. It has the courage to throw away complaint and powerlessness. It has the courage to break the cycle of complaint. One of the things Jesus says to all of us today is, "Throw off the complaining! Stop whining! Get up!"

So, it is not just Bartimaeus who is healed and renewed in this story. The disciples, too, are renewed! It is the entire community who becomes healthy and renewed. When the disciples say, "Take heart, get up. He is calling you," they become united with Bartimaeus!

"Take heart, get up!" These could be the most important words in the story today. Take a look at the other places in the gospels where that phrase is used, "Take heart. Be of good cheer" (they are the same word in Greek). Every other time the phrase is used, it is uttered by Jesus himself. (Matthew 9:2, 9:22, 14:27, John 16:33).

"Take heart," are the words Jesus uses to build up faith, to build up his church, and to build up the world. The world, with all our serious problems, needs these words from Jesus. But, even more, the world needs Jesus' disciples to use those words. Here, in this story of Bartimaeus, Jesus's disciples themselves actually use the words. They truly become church. They are poised to become a transformative community.

Part of this story, then, is about the disciples becoming a healthy church, learning how to hear someone who has been crying out. It is the disciples who learn how to assist those in need, not to dismiss the needy as simply another group of complainers.

When Jesus says, "Call him here," and when the crowd calls the blind man, and when man jumps up and throws off his cloak – in those moments, the cycle of disease is broken. Jesus breaks the culture of complaint and introduces a culture of generosity.

Generosity. Because the question that Jesus then asks is the way of generosity, "What do you want me to do for you?" Maybe, to the crowd, Jesus' question must have seemed oddly unnecessary. Why couldn't Jesus understand already what the man needed? Everybody else in town knew.

Well, Jesus needs Bartimaeus to declare, openly and clearly, what the problem was. It is that direct and probing question of Jesus which propels the final healing power of the event. Jesus somehow has the ability to strike at the heart of the illness and poverty of Bartimaeus. But the healing is complete, the discipleship is complete, when Bartimaeus claims it, just as we are healed only when we voluntarily accept it. Jesus says to each of us, "Tell me, exactly and precisely and clearly, what it is that you want." For us today, sometimes it takes a lifetime to know clearly what we want.

Bartimaeus claims his healing with an honest and clear declaration of what he needs. He says, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus calls that action faith. The one who cries out, the one who speaks directly, is the one who has faith. When Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well," scripture says that Bartimaeus regained his sight and "followed Jesus on the way." He followed Jesus on the way.

The church, our Christian church, is meant to be on that way, too, meant to be that healing community which Jesus begins with mercy and generosity. Our community, our way, is meant to be an alternative to the world around us. This world has all sorts of folks sitting beside the road: crying out, complaining. Some have legitimate reasons to cry out. For sure, the Christian Church is meant to hear, and to respond to, those who cry out legitimately.

But the Christian Church is also meant to be the journey away from the culture of complaint and towards a culture of generosity. When Bartimaeus took heart and got up, he ended up being healed, and joining the procession. He followed Jesus on the way. It is a grand and beautiful procession.

Take heart! Join the procession! It consists of Jesus, the converted disciples, the healed Bartimaeus, and us. The world needs us. The world needs generous Christians, not complaining Christians. When we throw off our cloaks of complaint and illness, we join the procession of generosity and resurrection. Our procession will transform the world.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip