

The Gospel of Mark is both the earliest and shortest of the four Gospels that have come down to the church. Because of its structure, it is sometimes referred to by scholars as a Passion Narrative with a brief introduction. After all, today we are at the end of the 10th chapter out of a 16 chapter book. The healing of the blind man, Bartimaeus, is the climax of the first half of the story, and is the last miracle in this Gospel.

There are numerous things that make this account unique. The healing happens as Jesus and his disciples are leaving Jericho, surrounded by a crowd of others. Jericho was the first city to be entered by the Israelites a millennium before, as they left the wilderness and came into the Holy Land. They were led then by Jeshua, another version of the name Jesus. It is as though this is a new entry into salvation.

We are introduced to Bartimaeus, who was sitting in his blindness, where he had begged for years. He is the only person healed in Mark who is called by name. This suggests that the community to whom Mark is writing knows the man. Clearly, he could hear the crowd reporting that the person coming up the road toward him was Jesus of Nazareth, and he began to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

As the Reverend Scott Hoezee points out, the words of his cry are significant. 'Son of David' is a particular way of saying 'messiah', and this is the only time in Mark where Jesus is addressed in this way. "Have mercy on me," is the phrase which has entered so deeply into Christian liturgy – *kyrie eleison*." Is it any wonder that even though the crowd does their best to shut him up, Jesus nevertheless heard him cry out, and instructed the crowd to call him to come forward.

There was nothing hesitant about the response of Bartimaeus. He sprang up from the ground, throwing aside the cloak which was undoubtedly his only article of outerwear. He was still blind, but he didn't hesitate to spill out of that cloak what few coins he had collected. And Jesus asked the same question he had put to the Zebedee boys in the reading that we heard last week: 'What do you want me to do for you?' The response was instantaneous: "*rabbouni*, My teacher, I want to see again." The honorific, *rabbouni*, is only used one other time in the four

gospels, when Mary Magdalene recognizes the risen Christ on Easter morning.

The results were as direct as the beggar's request: "Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way." Bartimaeus followed the savior whom he saw with greater clarity than anyone else; followed him to Jerusalem and all that would happen there. He received not only healing but resurrection.

When I read this story, I am amazed by both the persistence and the spiritual insight of the man. His life after this was undoubtedly as filled with the good and the terrible as all of our human lives are between cradle and grave. But I am also sure that he always held his life as marked by the great blast of holiness which turned a corner for him.

What does this say to us about our own lives and how we see them? I am reminded of an article written by Stanley Hauerwas, a theologian and ethicist who teaches at Duke Divinity School. He was reflecting on the very specific question of how we as Christians think of our lives. He was sure that all of us, also, exist in a world where we will know pain and trials, occasional triumphs and goodness. But how do we add it all up for ourselves?

His point of reference came from a book which I wholeheartedly recommend to you: [The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from an Ancient Landscape](#), by James Rebanks, written in 2015. Rebanks is a man who has followed uncounted generations of his family as shepherds in Northwestern England. He tells of the hard and nearly continuous work with his flocks on the pieces of land he runs, making what living he can, raising his children, working sometimes by himself and sometimes closely with neighbors for needed tasks.

At one point near the end of the book, Rebanks tells of a moment in his busy life: It is in the late spring, and he is in the process of returning his flock to the craggy hills.

These sheep had been bred to fend for themselves in a rocky terrain, and he writes, "When I leave my flock in the fells for summer and come down home, I leave something of myself up there with

them. So several times a day I look away to the skyline where they graze. The sheep's evident satisfaction to be back where they feel at home means that winter and spring are fast receding behind us. The ewes call to the lambs, following them as they climb up the crags. I lie down by the brook and cup out a handful of water. I slurp it. There is no water tastes so sweet and pure.

Then I roll over on my back and watch the clouds racing by. My dogs, Floss and Tan, nuzzle into my side because they have never seen me stop like this.

This is my life.

I want for no other."

It was this phrase that struck Hauerwas so forcefully. It is an expression of what people used to call 'having a good life,' but is not much used nowadays. He faults the church for not having taught us that 'the good life' comes from the narrative of our faith and our relationship to the Holy. He feels that in our time people think of the good life as one in which they have not been unduly burdened – their second marriage has turned out ok, their children are not addicts and they have enough money to retire. Most of what they want can be sent for from Amazon. But that seems rather minimalist compared to "This is my life. I want no other."

That is a phrase which I could hear Bartimaeus speaking at the end of his life, in spite of the hard years of begging for his living. Once you have stood before Jesus and been asked what it is you want him to do for you, once you have felt the lifting of the blindness that has covered your eyes for longer than you can remember, surely whatever comes after this is glory everlasting.

Are we prepared to put ourselves on this path? I believe that the major requirement would be to quiet ourselves and listen for the presence of the one who gave himself for us. That might be pursued in moments of prayer or in the sight of autumn colors on the trees, in reading that moves our hearts or in night breezes whistling past us. However we move into reflective quiet we could hear the question, "What do you want me to do for you," and stammer back, "My savior, give me the sight of you in my life."

