

"Stop! In the Name of Love"

Mark 10:46-52

Preached by

Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

October 28, 2012

Those of you who came of age in the sixties recognize the sermon title is not original. I am certain some of you have connected the title to the song sung by Mary, Diana and Flo, known as The Supremes.

"Stop! In the Name of Love" was recorded in January, 1965, and quickly rose to the top of the charts. In less than two months, it became their fourth of twelve number one hits. When Jackie and I were dating, we would sing along with the Supremes when it came on the radio, and, of course, she would provide the appropriate hand movements.

This song came to mind again as I studied this text. "Stop in the name of love before you break my heart" seemed to be the message Bartimaeus was sending Jesus that day on the outskirts of Jericho when Jesus passed through on his way to Jerusalem. Listen, as I tell the story.

Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem to observe Passover. It was customary for crowds to gather around pilgrims as they made their journey, especially if someone in the group was teaching. Caravans became mobile classrooms, and even those unable to go to Jerusalem would walk a short distance with those who would complete the journey. Since Jesus had a reputation as a good teacher who courageously challenged the religious authorities, many walked with him and listened carefully to what he said.

Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside where Jesus' caravan passed. When he heard that Jesus was near, he began to shout, "Son of David! Jesus! Have pity on me!" He repeated the cry for help, even though many around him tried to silence him.

Upon hearing Bartimaeus, Jesus **came to a complete stop**. "Call him here," he said. The beggar wasted no time throwing off his cloak, so he could run. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. "Rabbi, I want to see," the beggar said. Jesus replied, "Go! Your faith has healed you." Immediately, he was healed and followed Jesus with everyone else.

Why do you think Bartimaeus made a scene the day Jesus passed by and cried out so loudly? I believe this was an indication of how desperate he was, and how much confidence he had in Jesus. In

Mark's gospel, Bartimaeus was the first to address Jesus as the expected Messiah of the Davidic line. Isn't it interesting that a blind beggar could see what others could not? Adversity is a good teacher, isn't it?

Have you ever been shunned, ignored, overlooked and given the impression you were worthless? Has anything ever happened to you that helps you to identify with Bartimaeus? In that culture, as well as ours, beggars were nobodies. The only time someone spoke to them was to remind them of their insignificance.

Do you know what rejection does to a person, and how devastating it is to their self-esteem? Do you know how it makes a person feel to realize that no one hears their cry for help? Have you ever felt that lonely and that level of despair? If you have, surely you are committed to preventing it from happening to anyone around you.

Why do you think the people around Bartimaeus rebuked him and tried to silence him? He was a nuisance. They could not hear Jesus talking for all the commotion Bartimaeus was making. Besides, they were convinced Jesus was too important or busy for Bartimaeus.

Why do you think Jesus stopped and called for Bartimaeus? How could the man that told the parable of the Good Samaritan do differently?

Do you recall the words he read in the synagogue in Nazareth as he began his public ministry? "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and **recovery of sight for the blind**, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened upon him, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" Luke 4:18-21. How could the person that spoke those words not stop to help Bartimaeus? Hearing pleas for help that others ignored was the essence of his faith.

Why do you think Jesus healed Bartimaeus? After all, he refused to grant James and John's request in the previous passage when he asked them the same question he asked Bartimaeus. "What do you want me to do for you?"

It appears to me that Jesus was not interested in granting requests for positions of honor and privilege. He was, however, more than eager to help people see those things that would make life better for them and all those around them.

The placement of this story in Mark's gospel is strategic. It comes at the end of a block of material in Mark that begins and ends with Jesus healing two blind men (Mark 8:22-10:52). This is not

coincidental, but symbolic of the disciples' inability to discern Jesus' mission and purpose. The dialogue between Jesus and his disciples while on their way from Galilee to Jerusalem reveals this.

Three times on this journey, Jesus told the disciples he would be rejected by the religious authorities, suffer and die. It appears this warning went over their heads. When he told them that he came to serve others, not to be served, they responded by asking for positions of honor and prestige. When he reminded them that in God's kingdom the first would be last and the last first, they asked to be placed at the front of the line. Is there any doubt the disciples were spiritually blind? I don't think so.

Evidently, Mark's readers were, too. Seems they were focusing upon the wrong things, and failing to do what Jesus did during his time on earth. What do you think they were overlooking? **What did Mark want them to understand about ministry?**

In God's kingdom, no one is to be left behind. Community embraces everyone. Everyone!

Repeatedly, Mark told his readers about Jesus reaching out to those that society ignored, the Gerasene demoniac, the Syrophoenician woman, the blind man at Bethsaida and even little children. Bartimaeus was another example of Jesus' inclusiveness and should serve as a reminder to us to leave no person behind.

This story clearly reminds us that it is the responsibility of believers to respond to those in need, not try to hide them. If you can get people's attention when you need help without shouting, you are fortunate. Not everyone in our culture has a family or circle of friends who responds to their needs, which is all the more reason we should.

Hearing pleas for help that others try to silence should be the essence of our faith, as it was for Jesus. Rather than being annoyed by those that cry out for help, we should be upset by the actions of those who silence them. It is the responsibility of the church to be the voice for the voiceless and an advocate for the powerless.

Look carefully at 10:49. The word "call" is used three times. "Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.' So they **called** to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's **calling** you.' "

Surely you see the significance of Mark using this word three times. It is the duty of the church to call outsiders to the forefront and make their needs known. If we don't do it, who will? I fear no one will.

A few years ago I heard Dr. James A. Forbes, Jr., speak. At that time, he was the senior minister of The Riverside Church in New York City, and Newsweek named him one of the most effective preachers in the English speaking world. After hearing him, I understood why.

One of the things he said that day that penetrated my heart was this. “We must get out of our cul-de-sacs of religiosity and join others on the road of life. We must listen for the cries of those who are hurting and go help them.”

Then he asked us, “Do you hear the cries of that mother who put her child to bed hungry? What about the child who is an orphan because his parents died of AIDS? What about the family that is heating their home with a dangerous kerosene heater because their electricity was cut off? What about the couple paying exorbitant interest rates on a loan to repair their car? What about the father who is having chest pains but has no insurance? Do you hear these people crying from where you are?” I am ashamed to say that often I don’t.

I am trying to be a better listener by walking in their shoes. What if that was me? What would I want someone to do? Would I want to be passed by and left out? Would I want my pleas for help to fall on deaf ears? No, I would not, so neither must I tune out those around me pleading for help.

There is something else I believe Mark wanted his readers to understand. **Building this inclusive community would be accomplished one person at a time.**

Notice how specific Jesus was after he heard this man cry out for help. “Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’ ” When the man arrived, Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”

I am convinced the way we are going to make the world better is one person at a time. Don’t ever think that what you do to help one person is insignificant or unimportant. It is God’s design for changing the world.

I know you have heard the story about the man who was throwing starfish that had been swept on the shore back into the ocean. When he told someone what he was doing, they asked him what difference it was going to make since there were so many starfish on the beach. The wise man lifted the starfish in his hand and said, “It will make a big difference to this one!”

Transferring what I have said today from the head to the heart is the hard part. Hearing and responding to the cries of those others try to silence requires a strong level of commitment to be the presence of Christ in a blind and deaf world. Bringing their plight to the world’s attention will take precious time and resources. I am convinced we cannot do it without God’s help. We are far too distracted and self-centered.

It will require an answer similar to Bartimaeus’ when Jesus asks us, “What do you want me to do for you?” Few questions expose our true nature and priorities.

I'm trying to reply by asking Jesus to open my eyes so that I might see more clearly his mission in the world and my role in it. I say that I am trying because a lot of other things cloud my vision and distract me. Only with God's help can I look beyond them to what is really important.

"Open My Eyes, That I May See"

Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me

Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free.

Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God thy will to see

Open my eyes illumine me, Spirit divine!

How about you? Do you need God's help to see more clearly? Are you ignoring the needs of those around you, and the positive impact you could have upon them? Whose pleas for help at school, work, in your neighborhood or even your family have fallen on deaf ears, including yours?

"Stop! In the name of love, before you break my heart." Will you stop and make hope visible in the week ahead when you hear someone crying for help?