Sermon
“Help, I’ve Fallen and I Can’t Get Up”
Mark 10:46-52
Sunday, October 25, 2015

A hiker, who strayed too close to a cliff, slipped and fell over. As he tumbled head long over the edge, he managed to grab a few shrubs and bushes on the way down, all of which eluded his grasp, but they did slow him down until, about to take the final plunge into the abyss, the smallest of twigs growing out of a cleft in the rock held him fast.

Unfortunately, his feet were dangling in nothing but air, so now, looking up from whence he'd fallen, he threw out a desperate call for help: "Help! Help! I'm in trouble here. Someone up there, please help me."

Whereupon God who heard his cry responded and said, "This is God. I am here to help you!"
"Oh, thank you, please help me!"
"Of course," God said "The first thing you must do is let go of the branch."
There was a long pause. Then the hiker said, "Is there anyone else up there?"

In her book Mayday: Asking for Help in Times of Need M. Nora Klaver writes, "Asking for help is a universally dreaded endeavor. Whether we're struggling with getting that heavy bag in the overhead bin on the airplane, or fixing a flat tire by the side of the road, we are much more likely to say, 'I'm good' instead of 'Can you help?' If we fall and can't get up, we'd generally rather crawl out to the street, and get in the car than inconvenience someone else, and thus reveal our problem or weakness. 'I got this,' we'd prefer to say."

Klaver believes there are many reasons why would rather cling to a branch over an abyss than to cry out for:

- Some of us were never taught how to ask for help.
- Many of us love our independence
- Others of us don't even think to ask. We’re so focused on caring for ourselves that we don't even realize when we need help.
- Still others of us convince ourselves that it's easier to do it alone. And besides whom among us wants to be indebted to someone else?
- A vast majority of us are afraid to ask. We're afraid of what asking for help might say about us.

"In short," says Klaver, “we're very good at trying to do it ourselves, achieving modest results, instead of getting real help and making real progress. And in so doing we miss out on the gifts that someone else can give us."

In our Bible Study for this morning Bartimaeus had no such qualms about asking for help. Scripture tells us that as Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho on their way up to Jerusalem a large crowd was following. It was as if every fire department, antique car collector and marching band from the entire county had shown up for a 4th of July Day Parade in some small town. The noise alone would have been deafening. And yet, according to Mark’s Gospel, it is the sole voice of Bartimaeus that Jesus hears.

The commentary in Homiletics Magazine suggests that Bartimaeus was a pathetic figure, having little, if any, value. “In the eyes of society,” states the Commentary, “a beggar like Bartimaeus was virtually worthless; someone who existed at the bottom of the social ladder and lived at the margin.” Chances are Bartimaeus wasn’t even the blind beggar’s given name for when translated Bartimaeus literally means ‘Son of Timaeus.’ It would be like calling me ‘Son of Ray’ which is my Dad’s name but not my name. Bartimaeus is portrayed by Mark as a nobody: a person with no name and a person of no consequence to the crowd. And yet it his voice, that we, the reader hear rising above the cacophony of all
the other voices within the crowds. And it is his voice that Jesus hears as well! What is about his voice that is so different from every other voice in the crowd? What is it that catches the attention of Jesus?

Bartimaeus is the only one who is correctly identifying Jesus. The man without sight…the man whom the crowds considered a nobody is the only one who truly sees Jesus for who Jesus truly is. According to the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary this is the first time in Mark’s Gospel that Mark uses the title ‘Son of David’ in reference to Jesus. In other words, it takes a blind man for us to see that Jesus is the promised ‘Son of David:’ the prophesized king that has come forth from David’s lineage.

The implications of this passage are mind-shattering! The very man who has fallen and can’t get up is the only one who sees Jesus. Hearing his cries, the crowds order him to be quiet. I can see it now: the louder he shouts the louder the crowds become. Their goal is to drown out Bartimaeus’ voice…their goal is to push him further back from Jesus. Their desire is for Jesus to see them not to hear the babbling voice of an old blind fool who has no value.

But the more they order him the louder he becomes: “Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!”

It’s kind of like those infomercials of old Mrs. Fletcher who has fallen and can’t get up. Nobody, except for Life Alarm, even cares that she has fallen. The rest of the world is out watching the parade but poor Mrs. Fletcher is back home laying on the kitchen floor. Bartimaeus is no different from Mrs. Fletcher; he keeps getting pushed off into the background. The crowds are hoping that he will soon be forgotten and that they will have captured the attention of Jesus. The only problem; the crowds see Jesus as the flavor of the day; whereas the blind son of Timaeus — the man with no name — the man with no sight — sees Jesus as the Promised One.

What can we learn about ourselves from this blind son of Timaeus…this man with no name…this man forced to the outside fringes of the parade?

First, we learn that even though we must name our need before the Lord, we must understand that we have a much bigger problem than blindness. Like Bartimaeus, we have all fallen and like Bartimaeus none of us can get up by ourselves. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar, which meant that his only hope for a productive life was to regain his sight. He knows his need, but notice that he doesn’t lead with his need for sight, but rather with his need to receive mercy. Notice that in the scripture text Bartimaeus is not crying out; “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up” or as in his case “I’m blind and I cannot see.” For Bartimaeus Jesus is not just some ‘fix’ that heals us from what ails us. Jesus is the Son of David, in whom there is justice and mercy. Bartimaeus knows that Jesus can do something about the things that bind him, rather than the things that blind him.

The second thing we learn from Bartimaeus is to take a leap of faith. As the crowds were pushing him further to the margins what does scripture tell us Bartimaeus did? He shouted out all the more; “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Even when the crowds rebuked him and told him to be quiet what did Bartimaeus do? He shouted out all the more; “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” In spite of the crowds pushing him further and further away from Jesus Bartimaeus takes the leap of faith by shouting out all the more.

But this isn’t the only time he takes a leap of faith. Scripture tells us that when Jesus heard his cries, and said, “Call him here,” Bartimaeus responded by throwing off his cloak and leaping up off the floor. The commentary in Homiletics Magazine describes the scene like this: “When Bartimaeus heard this amazing invitation, he threw off his cloak, which held every coin that people had tossed into it, and ran as fast as he could toward Jesus, being guided by Jesus’ voice.” When following Jesus there comes a point in our lives when we must take the leap of faith and jump up off the floor.

In spite of what blinds us…
In spite of the crowds pushing us off to the margins…
In spite of having fallen and the inability to get up off the floor…
And in spite of waiting on the floor until the Life Alarm Team finally comes to our rescue…
When Jesus calls to us we must take that leap of faith and get up off the floor. Bartimaeus blind as he is and without any help from the crowd, follows the voice of Jesus! Why? Because he recognizes that in Jesus he has found his Lord and his Savior. In John 10:27 Jesus reminds us: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

The third thing we learn is related to the leap of faith that we must take; a faith in Christ is that which brings forth a new and transformed life. The commentary Ransom for Many reminds us that “Jesus’ question in v.51, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ is exactly the same question he asked James and John in v.36. What they wanted was glory, honour, prestige – pride of place alongside Jesus in the Kingdom of God. Here is a clue to why Mark has included this story! Still blind to the true nature of Jesus’ mission, James and John made a grab for glory. Now here stands a man who is literally blind. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The answer is obvious; but Jesus wants him to speak it out, because that makes his need clearer and encourages his faith. ‘I want to see’! In fact he calls Jesus ‘Rabboni’, the more respectful form of the word ‘Rabbi’ – my lord, my master. Jesus needs no dramatic gestures. In a moment, without any fuss, Bartimaeus receives what he asks for. Suddenly, his darkness is ended. The sun shines again. Bartimaeus can see.”

And the fourth thing we learn from Bartimaeus is a result of the new life that we now have in Christ: gratefulness. Homiletics Magazine says, “When we have an attitude of gratitude, it tends to shake us out of our self-sufficiency, and allows us to celebrate what others have done for us.”

Ransom for Many says of Bartimaeus’ attitude of gratitude: he falls in behind Jesus and heads for Jerusalem with a “special, additional reason for going there. He will be making a sacrifice to thank God for giving him back his sight. No longer a helpless beggar, Bartimaeus now has a life!” His gratitude is not merely words, but the actions of a follower. He cannot reciprocate what Jesus has done for him, but he can give his life in response.

You and I live in a world that has fallen, and can't get up on its own. We've fallen, too, and there are times that we need help in order to stand again.

Like Bartimaeus may we not be afraid to ask…,
  may we step out in faith…,
  may we be made new in Christ…,
  and may we be grateful to the God who supplies our every need.