

# Trust the Teacher ...

*... to show us the way*

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*A sermon given on the Last Sunday after Trinity, 27th October 2024, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.*

*Mark 10:46-End*

It's a cliché, isn't it, that life is a journey? Time doesn't stand still. So there is always this sense that we are on the move, always making our way through different scenes of life. And that's nothing new. The early church talked in a more particular way, not about life in general, but about the Christian faith as 'The Way.' It picks up the idea of faith as a pilgrimage, something alive and lived out, always changing, and with a sense of heading for a destination we haven't yet arrived at. The story of Bartimaeus that we've just heard in today's gospel begins and ends with mention of the way. At the beginning, Bartimaeus is sitting by the roadside, in the Greek 'para ten hodo' that is **'by the way'**, not on it. In other words, he's not yet a follower of Jesus, not yet a disciple, not yet 'on the way'. The irony is that despite being blind, Bartimaeus is a mere observer - a spectator on the sidelines. Perhaps the connection is deliberate: perhaps the blindness and the 'observer status' go together; perhaps there is a sense that those who stay on the sidelines, uncommitted, weighing up the pros and cons without ever making a decision - perhaps there is a sense that they are spiritually blind. But by the end of the story, we're told Bartimaeus followed Jesus 'on the way' - Greek 'en te hodo.' - he's no longer at the roadside, he's a fellow traveller with the disciples and the fledgling church. He's made a commitment, no longer detached and pretending to be neutral, he's made a move, taken a risk, and offered his life.

So the story of Bartimaeus isn't just a nice miracle story of how Jesus healed a poor, blind man. It's a story about discipleship, about what it takes to become a Christian, a follower of Christ. You and I are invited to stand in the place of Bartimaeus - his story could be our story. If you or I take the plunge and follow Jesus, maybe we shall find that we start to see things more clearly, too.

Mark's gospel is very interested in this theme of discipleship, especially in this central part of the gospel, where several other people raise questions about what it means to follow Jesus. Earlier in chapter 10, we heard the story of the rich man. There, just as in the Bartimaeus story, Jesus was setting out on a journey. Perhaps the question might be in our minds, who's going to join him? A rich man runs up and kneels before him. He seems to be full of eagerness and humility, and he asks a spiritual question, "*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*" This man looks like a prime candidate for Christian discipleship. He says he's even kept all the Commandments - surely he must be close to the Kingdom of Heaven. But the rich man's problem is that he wants to stay in control. What must I do to inherit eternal life? he asks. He thinks eternal life is a goal he can achieve through his own efforts; something he can do, something he can initiate and manage; a process he can control, as if it's just another goal to tick off his bucket list. When Jesus challenges him to sell everything and give it away and then follow him, Jesus isn't actually asking him to become poor as such - he's asking him rather to give up control, to surrender his own agenda, to trust God rather than his own resources. Bartimaeus, on the other hand, has no resources. He's just a blind beggar, dependent upon the generosity of others. The only thing Bartimaeus has is his cloak and when Jesus calls him, Bartimaeus jumps up and throws off his cloak and comes to Jesus. His only possession, he throws away so that he can come to Jesus. It's a way of saying

that Bartimaeus came to Jesus unconditionally, wholeheartedly, without making any attempt to do it on his own terms. He was willing to trust Jesus and Jesus alone. As a result, he came out of his spiritual blindness and saw clearly.

Sometimes it's true that it's those who have least to lose who find it easiest to let go of what they have in order to follow Jesus. I wonder this morning, what do you and I need to throw away in order to come to Jesus? What are the things we cling to which we use to try and stay in control and which might cause us, like the rich man, to walk away from Jesus, grieving? The rich man ended up walking away, grieving; Bartimaeus, in contrast, sprang up and came to Jesus and followed him on the way.

Just immediately before the story of Bartimaeus is the story of James and John, who also come up to Jesus to ask him a favour. Jesus asks the same question to James and John as he puts to Bartimaeus, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" James and John want power and glory. "*Grant us,*" they say, "*to sit one at your right-hand and one at your left, in your glory.*" Jesus replies, "*You don't know what you're asking.*" In other words, James and John are ignorant; their minds have been darkened; they are trapped in a spiritual blindness; they think the meaning of life is all about power and control and success. Bartimaeus, on the other hand, says in response to Jesus's question, "*My teacher, let me see again.*" It's an intriguing request. Teachers don't normally cure disease - if that's what you really want, you go to a doctor. But Bartimaeus has recognised Jesus as the one who can help him to see, not only physically, but spiritually: this teacher can give understanding; this teacher can offer real insight; this teacher blows away the dark clouds of ignorance and prejudice and muddle and selfishness, and helps his followers to see more clearly who they are, where they're going, what their purpose is in life, and whom they should follow. It's so easy to drift through life not sure where we're going. Maybe Bartimaeus was doing that, just going from day to day, subsisting, wondering whether he was going to enough handouts to make it through the next day - never asking those big questions, What am I here for? Where am I going? What's it really all about?

I wonder, where are you going on your journey of life? I wonder whether you can see the way clearly to your destination. Have you heard the invitation to follow Jesus on the way? He's the one who can lead us to the heavenly city. He has been there before us, and he knows the way.

Sometimes the journey takes us to green pastures and still waters. Sometimes it takes us into the valley of the Shadow of Death. But the guide is sure, and his words are trustworthy. He helps us to see more clearly the way.

The only question is whether we think we can read the map better than he can, whether we insist on relying on our own resources, keeping control of our own lives, or whether we're willing to throw away our cloak, whatever it may look like, and trust the teacher to give us sight and to show us the way.

# Reading Text

## Mark 10:46-End

<sup>46</sup> They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' <sup>48</sup> Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' <sup>49</sup> 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.' <sup>50</sup> So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. <sup>51</sup> 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.' <sup>52</sup> Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.