

October 24, Ordinary 30B (Mark 10:46-52)

More than a miracle story, this is a story of a call.

by [Timothy Adkins-Jones](#) in the [October 10, 2021](#) issue

Jericho is a logical stop on the road to Jerusalem. Fifteen miles northeast of the Holy City, it was a convenient stop on the pilgrim's path that Jesus took to the cross. In Jesus' day Jericho was a rich and flourishing town, host to a considerable amount of trade and celebrated for the palm trees that adorned the surrounding plain.

But I imagine that for many of us, our acquaintance with Jericho has more to do with its mention in Joshua 6, in the famed story of the walls of this great city tumbling down at the shout of God's army. In that story, victory is found because of the people's willingness to shout—that is, to go against the typical war strategy and to obediently cry out for triumph. In a way, the encounter chronicled in our passage for this week is similar: victory is found by one's willingness to go against the typical strategy and cry out for help.

All of the usual healing story elements are present here. Someone has an identifiable ailment, this person has been unable to find a solution, and Jesus provides the cure. But in this instance, the mechanism through which Jesus is summoned stands out. Earlier in Mark (8:22-26), another blind man is healed, but that man is passive and unnamed. Here, we have both a name, Bartimaeus, and a man who is shouting for Jesus' attention.

Bartimaeus is outside normal communal operations. His role as a blind man is to be barely seen and not often heard. It is an audacious act for him to shout. His quiet presence should remind pious community members of their obligation to give alms; he does not have a right to be obtrusive. He is allowed to beg but not to badger.

Yet Bartimaeus cries out, and then he cries out all the more when told to be quiet. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" It's unclear whether it is the volume, the desperation, or the specifics of his words that stop Jesus. But Jesus stops and commands that the man be called. And here is where I think this healing story reveals that, more than a miracle story, this is a story of a call, a disciple accepting

an assignment.

The transformation of Bartimaeus begins before he is given sight. Yes, he ends up receiving a physical healing in this encounter with Jesus, but before he's healed, he is able to perceive Jesus more clearly than almost anyone else Jesus has encountered in Mark's Gospel up to this point. Notice that Bartimaeus is told that it is "Jesus of Nazareth" who is coming by—a title that identifies Jesus only by his peasant hometown. But when Bartimaeus cries out he says, "Jesus, son of David"—identifying Jesus by his messianic designation. So far in Mark, no one else has been able to perceive Jesus this well with so little data. This is the only passage in which the title "son of David" appears in Mark, and it's worth noting that Jesus does not silence him. Mark's Jesus, who has been so secretive about his identity, not only allows Bartimaeus to refer to him this way but rewards him with sight.

Bartimaeus may not be the obvious choice for model disciple, but this is how he's presented to us in this passage. He is able to see Jesus for who he really is, he makes his way to Jesus with a kind of desperate reckless abandon that can't be hindered, and his approach includes an expectation of transformation. When he gets word that Jesus has beckoned him to come, Bartimaeus throws off his cloak and comes with exuberance to Jesus. Someone in Bartimaeus's position would ordinarily do well to keep his cloak, one of his few possessions, close at hand for fear of it being stolen—but Bartimaeus expects a change in his status. He must know that receiving the ability to see will restore him to a place of wholeness in society. It's almost as if his casting off of the cloak is a public answer to a question not yet posed: *Yes, I do want to be made well!*

Oh, that we would see Jesus the way Blind Bartimaeus does! As the Messiah, as the son of David with all of the salvific and political implications embodied in that title. We need to expect transformation, to go into this relationship with God not with one hand in and one hand out but fully committed to throwing off our own cloaks in order to serve. I am confident that Jesus is calling us, just as he called Bartimaeus—and we have to make a decision about how we're going to respond and whether we really believe that there is something in us that Jesus can heal.

Bartimaeus leads the way, for he recognizes his healing not as something to be selfishly enjoyed but as a call to discipleship. Jesus tells him to go his own way because his faith has made him well, but Bartimaeus chooses instead to follow Jesus on the road. When blessed, when healed, when delivered by God, the temptation is to take our gift and to walk away. Bartimaeus reminds us that a disciple always

follows and that the way to life is always behind Jesus.