

Mark 10:46-52

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

⁴⁶ 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. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ 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.” ⁵⁰ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher,^[a] let me see again.” ⁵² Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Let me ask you a question: Do you think you are a good listener? I think I am. And most of you probably do too. Some of you may think they are not. And a few probably didn't listen...

Now let me ask you a second question: What makes a good listener? Is it someone who keeps quiet while others speak? Someone who can repeat every word you just said? Is it someone who asks clever questions? Or someone who truly understands what you are trying to say?

It's probably a bit of everything.

But why am I asking you these questions, you may ask? Because it is something I keep noticing in the stories about Jesus. Every time Jesus is around and a group of people gathers around him, there's someone who gets left behind. And whoever that is, women, children, beggars, gentiles or outcasts, as soon as they are trying to catch up and reach out to Jesus, there's someone to stop them. There's someone in the group around Jesus, sometimes even some of his disciples, who seem to think that they are worth Jesus company and others are not. As if it were a privilege to some and not a right to everyone.

Did they not listen? Aren't they doing the exact opposite of what Jesus is trying to teach them?

So what do think? Are you a good listener?

The people I was just talking about probably didn't listen. I always immediately picture them as completely self-righteous men, sitting around this famous teacher, calling him master and eagerly nodding to everything he says. What he says doesn't seem to be important, because hey! 'I have met Jesus!'

In the end it's about them, not even Jesus or his teachings. But who do they think they are? What brings them to the conclusion that they deserve Jesus company more than others? Being men? Being Jews? Or just being quick enough to catch a seat in the front row? And then they don't even listen properly. Jesus is repeatedly telling people to treat everyone equal as a child of God. And as soon as one of those children of God approaches, they turn around and chase them away? Imagine how frustrating it must have been for Jesus to go through all of this, over and over again and how much patience it must have required. You really need to be the son of God to not lose your temper every time you're surrounded by those people, completely ignoring what you just said.

This is the worst kind of listener! And it's the exact opposite of 'What would Jesus do?'

Now let me ask you a third question: What would Jesus do? And what would you do?

Would you have listened? And would you have understood? Would you welcome a stranger to your table? A beggar, a criminal, a child, someone of another religion or country?

I know, you can't answer this question with a simple yes or no, because it's complicated and there's circumstances to consider. But what would you like to do? What do you think you should do? What do you think everyone in this room should do, including you?

Or maybe, would you be the stranger, the beggar, the criminal from another country? A child among adults or practicing the wrong religion? Some of you have made that

experience, I know that. How did you want to be treated? And how were you treated? Did you meet Jesus? Or were you chased away, denied what should be your right, not your privilege?

I don't want to live in a world where you need permission to meet or listen to someone. I don't want people to chase other people away. And I don't want people to think they deserve more than others because of whatever reason. If we truly want to believe that we can learn from Jesus teachings, we need to do more than just be quiet and say yes. We need to understand and repeat. And we need to do it!

If I say that I don't want to live in such a world, I can't just lean back and wait for someone else to fix it. I need to do it myself! And of course, I can't do it alone, so let me now ask you not a question, but a favour: Will you join me? Will you welcome a stranger when you meet one? Will you support a blind person's way to healing?

Because I will!