

Let's listen to a story of three miracles.

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, BarBartimaeus, son of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then 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." ⁵²Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately, he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Bartimaeus has everything going against him. Everyone dismisses him as a non-entity. Even Mark defines him as a son, blind and a beggar. We don't even know his name; he is 'Timaesus' blind son. The Jericho crowd sees him as a panhandler who should remain unseen and unheard and not bother Jesus.

Hey Bartimaeus, be still and keep your mouth shut! It's probably not the first time he has heard that. This nobody, this blind beggar---has the nerve to cry out to Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me

The crowd tries to silence him as he stirs up things with this Son of David talk. The Son of David would be a great liberator who came to restore Israel to glory. Even using this title for Jesus was enough to catch the Romans' attention. The last thing they need is for this nobody to stir people up with any messiah talk. They want to silence this nonentity and be on their way.

Remember the old question of what the shortest verse in the Bible is? It is Jesus wept (John 11:35) It happened when he cried outside the tomb of Lazarus, whom Jesus loved. This is the shortest verse in the Bible. But I want to give you two more words that we need to treasure because they reveal Jesus's heart.

JESUS STOPPED when people in need came to him. Jesus stopped for them and will stop for us. Next time you are reading the gospel stories, notice the number of times Jesus stopped to meet a need or engage someone. A widow who lost her son, folks possessed, people with all kinds of ailments from leprosy to the inability to hear. He

stopped for a centurion and a synagogue president. He stopped for tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes. He even stopped for the Pharisees.

He stops. He stops.

Many years ago, Martin Bell wrote “Rag Tag Army,” which beautifully illustrates God's patience and compassion for his “tiny soldiers” who often stray from the path.

I think God must be very old and very tired. Maybe God used to look splendid and fine in a general's uniform, but no more. God's been on the march a long time, you know. And look at this rag-tag little army! All God has for soldiers are you and me. Dumb little army. Listen! The drumbeat isn't even regular. Everyone is out of step. And there! You see? God keeps stopping along the way to pick up one of the tinier soldiers who decided to wander off and play with a frog, or run in a field, or whose foot got tangled in the underbrush. God'll never get anywhere that way. And yet, the march goes on.

Do you see how the marchers have broken up into little groups? Look at that group up near the front. Now, there's a snappy outfit. They all look pretty much alike—at least they're in step with each other. That's something! Only they're not wearing their shoes. They're carrying them in their hands. Silly little band. They won't get far before God will have to stop again.

Or how about that other group over there? They're all holding hands as they march. The only trouble with this is the ones on each end of the line. Pretty soon they realize that one of their hands isn't holding onto anything, one hand is reaching, empty, alone. And so, they hold hands with each other, and everybody marches around in circles. The more people holding hands, the bigger the circle.

And, of course, a bigger circle is deceptive because as we march along it looks like we're going someplace, but we're not. And so, God must stop again. You see what I mean? God'll never get anywhere that way!

If God were more sensible, God'd take this little army and shape them up. Why, whoever heard of a soldier stopping to romp in a field? It's ridiculous. But even more absurd is a general who will stop the march of eternity to go and bring him back. But that's God for you. This is no endless, empty marching. God is going somewhere. God's steps are deliberate and purposive. God may be old and tired. But God knows where God's going. And God means to take every last one of the tiny soldiers along. Only there aren't going to be any forced marches. And, after all, there are frogs and flowers, and thorns and underbrush along the way. And even though our foreheads

have been signed with the sign of the cross, we are only human. And most of us are afraid and lonely and would like to hold hands or cry or run away. And we don't know where we are going, and we can't seem to trust God—especially when it's dark out and we can't see God! And God won't go on without us. And that's why it's taking so long. Listen! The drumbeat isn't even regular. Everyone is out of step. And there! You see? God keeps stopping along the way to pick up one of the tinier soldiers who decided to wander off and play with a frog, or run in a file, or whose foot got tangled in the underbrush. God'll never get anywhere that way! And yet, the march goes on...

That's what God does. That's what Jesus does—they stop then and now. In our story, Jesus tells the crowd to bring Bartimaeus over. And here is the first miracle—oh, the focus is on the second miracle—Bartimaeus has his sight restored. He can see.

But the first miracle is just as important. Jesus sees, hears, and stops to acknowledge him, not as somebody's son, a blind, begging troublemaker. No, Jesus sees him as a child of God worthy of compassion and respect. And significant enough to stop for. Bartimaeus was a person who, through disability and poverty, was relegated to the boundaries, the outskirts of the community.

And with one question, Jesus starts the reversal of a long period of being no one. Or, as Jimmy Buffett sings Nobody from Nowhere. Jesus asks him what he wants Jesus to do for him. He treats him as a person significant enough to halt his journey. We are not sure what Bartimaeus thought of Jesus, but the title of the Son of David shows that he knows that this is a very important, holy person. And unlike the people who passed him by every day, maybe they dropped a coin but did not look at him. Jesus stops and addresses him directly. He treats him as a person fully capable of expressing his needs.

I have told this story before, but it sticks with me as a reminder of my calling. As a pastor, my days are sometimes interrupted by someone calling the church office and asking to speak to the pastor. And I will admit that after many years as a pastor, I must struggle not to go on autopilot. My autopilot tells me I will hear a familiar story, usually a variation on one I have heard many times before, and then request money. When I go on autopilot, I do just what the crowd did, treating this person as nonentity.

Since I know my immediate response needs to be changed, I try to consciously listen to the person as they tell me what they need. And I try to silence the inner voice crying scam, this is a scam. Most of the time, I find I can help or connect the person with the help they need. But first I must remind myself that I am dealing with a child

of God deserving of a listening ear and the question, "What do you want me to do for you?"

I think I shared this story with you before and got a reminder of this. This reminder was a blessing for me. A woman called our office and asked to speak to the pastor. I thought, here we go again, but I was pulled up short when she said she wanted me to pray for her. She was a messenger from God, reminding me that all folks are God's Children, and we need to see them as such. We need to stop. We can stop our assumptions and stop our judging. We can stop and listen with an open mind and an empathetic heart.

Donny Friederichsen tells this story:

When I was in third grade, my teacher, Mrs. Everett, stopped and pulled me aside to speak to me. She got down on my level, looked me straight in the eyes and told me, "You are a great student and one of the smartest kids in my class. I expect great things from you." I certainly didn't realize it at the time, but those words have meant so much to me. That Mrs. Everett would purposefully stop and encourage me in my schoolwork was transformative. For whatever reason, I believed her. I believed that I was smart, that I would do good things. When I graduated high school, I was the first recipient of the Judy Everett Scholarship. This was a scholarship set up by her family after she died far too early from ALS. She had seen something in me that was unnoticed by others, and it made all the difference.

<https://gospelreformation.net/jesus-stopped/>

Mrs. Everett stopped for Donny, and it made a world of difference.

Our willingness to stop for others is one mark of our discipleship, and it can make a world of difference for others.

Jesus stopped for Bartimaeus, a person who, through disability and poverty, was relegated to the boundaries of the community, if not outside of those boundaries. He was a person to be passed by, pitied, and, if lucky, given a small coin.

Jesus stops and has the crowd call him back into the center of things. Those who marginalized him and tried to silence him are now the ones who call him to come to Jesus.

And now, that is us—the ones who are to stop and call the marginalized and the pitied back into full community. Welcome to the community, child of God. We stand in the tradition of Jesus as we stop and welcome people home to their community.

Bartimaeus is so excited to be summoned by Jesus that he tosses his one possession aside, his cloak, and heads to Jesus.

When Jesus asks him what he wants him to do, he says I want to see. So, Jesus tells him his faith has restored his sight. But in restoring his sight, he is doing even more. Jesus is welcoming him back into the community. He is no longer an outcast but a redeemed child of God and should have always been treated like one.

A frequent post on Facebook reminds us that we don't know what is going on inside another person. They may appear bright and cheerful, but that may not be how they feel.

Jesus provides a model for us, and we can ask questions just as he did. What do you want me to do for you? We can stop and ask What do you want me to do for you?

But there is a third miracle here that we may have missed. We know Jesus stops in the Bible for people in need. We know Jesus restored Bartimaeus' sight. But do we trust that Jesus will stop for us and ask us what we need him to do for us?

I know that whatever our condition or self-identity, Jesus calls us to see ourselves as he sees us: a Child of God worthy of God's love. He asks us to answer his question, "What do you want me to do for you?" As we respond, we build the bridge with our request, and God will come to us and help us discover our identity as a beloved child of God (Based on Fredrick Buechner), which makes all the difference in the world. It can be life-changing for us.

After this, like Bartimaeus, we can continue our life journey by following Jesus as a faithful disciple. Jesus stopped and restored Bartimaeus's sight, restored him to the community, and welcomed him into his family. And Jesus will do the same for us.