

Mark 10:46-51 10.21.21 Bill Uetricht 22 Pentecost

“Kyrie, Eleison” by Fernando Ortega was played.

“Kyrie, Eleison” (by Dinah Reindorf) was sung.

“Kyrie, eleison,” Lord have mercy. It’s what Bartimaeus, the beggar who is blind cries out. The kyrie from Fernando Ortega and the kyrie that we just sang are very much in the style of a lament. Something is wrong, something that produces sadness. Quite often in our worship we begin our service with these words: kyrie, eleison, Lord, have mercy; Christe, eleison, Christ, have mercy. Before we say, “Ra, God, you are great,” we say, “Something’s wrong in the world; something’s wrong in our lives. Kyrie, eleison. Lord, have mercy.

For the man in our text, that wrongness is obvious. He’s blind. And consequently, he is a beggar. He lives on the margins of society, which is why he is sitting by the roadside. He is a neglected, forgotten, vulnerable member of his society. But this man has chutzpah. He knows what he wants, and he goes after it. When he cries out kyrie eleison, he is not just sadly lamenting, he is boldly asking, maybe even demanding.

Now I know that sometimes demanding doesn’t look good on us. I know that we live in a culture in which entitlement is a clear problem. Too many of us think that we deserve and are entitled to so many things. We can be bombastic and demanding in restaurants, grocery stores, on airline flights, at Little League baseball games. Entitlement is sometimes human beings at their worst. But I don’t think the blind man is entitled. My gosh, he spends much of his life on the side of the road. He is not the entitled of the society; he is the marginalized. And yet he speaks up for himself. He is bold enough to know what he wants and ask for it, and to do so twice, after Jesus’ disciples and perhaps other members of the crowd, serving as the guarantors of peace and

quiet, try to shut him up. “Kyrie, eleison.” Come to my aid. “Let me see again.”

Jesus, at the end of our reading, even before the man receives his sight, says to Bartimaeus, “Go, your faith has made you well.” Even before he was well, he was well, because he lived by faith, radical trust that Jesus could respond to his need. And part of his trust is the willingness to speak up for himself, to go after what he needs. So often in our life of faith, we often think it is improper to boldly ask for what we truly need. For many of us, faith is humble resignation, rather than active, demanding, or bold seeking and asking.

But life is crummy sometimes. Life can be mean. Listen to Anne Lamott from her compelling book, *Help Thanks Wow*:

It is all hopeless. Even for a crabby optimist like me, things couldn't be worse. Everywhere you turn, our lives and marriages and morale and government are falling to pieces. The planet does not seem long for this world. Repent! Oh wait, never mind. I meant: Help.

Oh, repent is sometimes not a bad message. Sometimes, it's the right message. After all, we humans can think and do some crazy things. We can, without a doubt, make life all about us. But sometimes the right move on our part is to cry, “Kyrie Eleison,” help!

Again, listen to Lamott:

What I wanted my whole life was relief—from pressure, from isolation, people's suffering (including my own, which was mainly mental), and entire political administrations. That is really all I want now. Besides dealing with standard-issue family crisis, heartbreak, and [craziness], I feel I can't stand one more death in my life. That's too bad, because as we speak, I have a cherished thirteen-year-old cat who is near death from lymphoma. I know I won't be able to live without her.

Lamott knows that her concern for her cat seems petty, considering the deaths that so many know, but I get her point. I feel I can't stand one more death in my life. "Kyrie, eleison, Lord, have mercy." It is the prayer and should be the prayer of our lives often. Mercy is what we need. Mercy is what we are seeking. Mercy is what will bring us home.

And the promise is that in the God met in Jesus, there is mercy. Mercy in death. Mercy in life. Mercy for weariness, which is what I am feeling currently. Mercy for brokenness. Mercy for craziness. Mercy for the enslaved and the addicted. Mercy for the vulnerable and forgotten. Mercy for "the blind and the lame, those with children and those in labor." Mercy for those who are not at home, have not been home, wonder if they will ever be at home. "Behold, I am going to bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth." I am going to bring them home because in me there is mercy.

The blind man knew that there was mercy in Jesus. He knew that in him could be found what he really needed and truly wanted, which is why he wouldn't give up until he got Jesus' attention, and why, after he did Jesus' attention, he took off his cloak and sprang up to meet Jesus.

Do you remember Mark's rich man from several weeks ago? He came to Jesus to ask him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him, "Sell all that you have and give to the poor." When the rich man heard this invitation, he turned his back on Jesus because he had lots of wealth. He couldn't let go. Now contrast the rich man with Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus, who didn't have anything, except perhaps his cloak that he used to keep warm, to cover himself while he is sleeping outside, let go of his cloak to spring up to meet Jesus and eventually follow him. Mark tells us that after Jesus declares that Bartimaeus'

faith has made him well, “Immediately, he regained his sight and followed him *on the way*.”

*On the way!* Bartimaeus is on the way with Jesus. He is a disciple of his. He is one who has much better sight than those who are not blind. Even in his blindness, he could see a lot better than the rich man or, for that matter, the twelve goof balls, as Joel Dulyea called the apostles in our class on Tuesday, apostles who in Mark have been concerned with almost nothing but power and prestige. Bartimaeus is what true discipleship looks like.

Here you thought being a disciple of Jesus meant having all your ducks in a row, having your homes and churches in nice, neat little order. Here you thought being a disciple meant having a smile plastered on your face all the time, reflecting that you and your family are one big happy clan for whom everything couldn't be better, for whom “marriages, morale, and government are not falling to pieces.”

I must admit that one of my pet peeves in church life has to do with the pictures that appear on religious television or on the websites of many big, prosperous megachurches. Generally, the pictures reveal a good-looking pastor, who almost always is male, with his good-looking wife and children right by his side, seeming to enjoy life fully, without any naughty or rebellious kids or wives who really have just had enough of this church life. Here, we are told, is the picture of discipleship.

Not so, according to Mark and to Mark's Jesus. Discipleship looks like a blind beggar who truly sees. A blind beggar who seeks mercy and finds mercy in Jesus. Do you know what it means to be a disciple of Jesus? To know that you need mercy in your life. A disciple is one who cries out, “Kyrie, eleison, Lord, have mercy!” A disciple is one who trusts that in the God of Jesus there is mercy. A disciple is one who

because of mercy wants to follow mercy, and thus, desires to live out mercy, to be mercy for other people.

Mark tells us at the beginning of our reading that Jesus and his disciples are in Jericho. In other words, they are making their way to Jerusalem, the city where Jesus will be crucified. Mercy is on its way to the place where mercy will cry out for more mercy. “Abba, Father, remove this cup from me. My, God, my God, why have you abandoned me.” Even mercy will need more mercy and will feel as if it is far away.

And amid all that, in the midst of a dying man on a cross, a man longing for mercy, mercy will touch us, for we will know that at the heart of life is a mercy that embraces lives like ours that cry out, “Kyrie, eleison, Lord have mercy.”

Listen to Fernando Ortega’s “Kyrie, Eleison.”