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## Introduction

A complex chapter of Marks gospel ends with the story of a blind beggar called Bartimaeus. His story stands in stark contrast to the other stories in the chapter of powerful ones who sought an encounter with Jesus because they discerned he could be of advantage to them. Bartimaeus is poor, blind and without influence or cynicism and requests only mercy from Jesus, and this he finds in abundance.

The story at the end of this chapter alerts us to the ultimate futility of the power we pursue so diligently and drives home Jesus message that servanthood is the true path to the Kingdom, a path which will entail suffering.

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## Text

### Mark 10:46–52

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Having spent the three previous weeks in Mark 10 we finally come to the end of the chapter and to perhaps one of the most familiar stories in all of the Gospels, beloved by Sunday schools everywhere. It's the story of Bartimaeus. And yet the familiarity and child-like elements of this story belie the complexity of the chapter and of this story's importance as the keystone for the whole.

Jesus has had a series of encounters with people who want something from him. The religious leaders wanted to bracket him in or out according to his exact interpretation of a disputed point of theology. The rich man sought to add to his store of wealth by acquiring an entitlement to the Kingdom. And two foolish disciples thought to steal a march on the rest of the insiders by claiming positions of power.

Together they represent the traditional sources of power in our world, religious, economic and political.

In between these encounters Jesus is constantly taking time with his followers (10:10-11; 23-26; 27-31; 32-35; 41-45) who simply don't get it. This is unsurprising really because even in our day people still seek the Kingdom through the exercise of religious, economic and political power. Just watch today's news.

Instead Jesus tells them greatness comes through service and those who place themselves last will have a prominent place in the Kingdom which is coming. And as a practical example, in the face of those who would wield religious, economic and political power for their own ends, Jesus meets the children and says that the Kingdom is received like a child, vulnerable, powerless and dependent.

Then comes the Bartimaeus story. As an aside, It's worth contemplating why he alone is given a name, out of all the encounters in this chapter with people from outside the inner circle. In fact, his is one of the very few healings in all four Gospels where the one healed is given a name (Lazarus, of course (John 11:38-44), Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9) and possibly Malchus (see Luke 22:50-51 and Matt 26:51, Mark 14:47, John 18:10).

The story is told very precisely. We note that Bartimaeus is sitting begging on the way out of Jericho. His persistence annoys the crowd, but all he is looking for is mercy, not theological exactitude, nor economic benefit, not even a humble place among the elite. And yet his way to the centre is barred by those who continue to misunderstand what it is to follow Jesus along the way.

But Bartimaeus, and let's continue to name him, is determined and he finally gets to meet Jesus. The telling of this story contrasts with all the other encounters. There is no cynicism in the man, in contrast to the religious leaders. Bartimaeus throws aside a precious possession, his cloak, in order to follow Jesus, unlike the rich man who couldn't forego his things. And he approaches at Jesus' invitation, rather than presume to have a place like James and John mistakenly did, which is perhaps why Jesus pointedly asks him exactly the same question he asked James and John after their bizarre demand (10:35).

Bartimaeus, the poor, blind man, begging on the way out of the city (perhaps unsurprisingly, the way Jesus was travelling) demonstrates by his answer to this question that he understands far more than those hungry for religious, economic

and political power.

“I want to see.” (10:51).

Perhaps all consideration of this gospel text should end here.

Bartimaeus receives the same response as the rich man, “Go!” and with it the necessary healing which the previous recipient of the command never availed of.

Mark regularly tells us through this chapter that Jesus is on the move (10:1, 17, 32, 46, 52). Only in verse 32 do we get information on his destination, Jerusalem. For those of us who know the ending of the story we know that the direction Jesus is travelling is towards suffering and the cross and Bartimaeus, who is no stranger to suffering, follows Jesus along that road.

We spend inordinate amounts of time and energy thinking and acting as if the Kingdom is inaugurated, protected or extended, by procuring, securing and exercising these various forms of power. We pursue them, perhaps as a way to avoid suffering and struggle. Jesus couldn’t be any clearer here though. To be first, you must choose the lowest position because greatness comes through service, for this is the self-professed example of Jesus himself (10:43–45).

So much of the conflict in our world, and in our faith communities occurs because of the self-interested or fearful execution of power which has the ultimate effect of destroying community. Instead, those who serve others, who seek and know a lowly place in the world, like the mighty Bartimaeus, find an encounter with one who can heal and who can be company on the way. Mutual service creates community.

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## Response

“I want to see,” said Bartimaeus in response to Jesus question.

We may assume that Mark intended us to see this comment as both a request for physical sight as well as a profound metaphor.

Take a moment to reflect on the sources of power you wield or have access to. What do you see?

Who do you see? In the course of your daily life, in all the places you go, who do you encounter? Whose lives do you regularly touch? Can you discern how your life impacts on them?

Who do you not see? In the course of your daily life who or what are you shielded from? In the way you commute, or the media you consume, or the places you frequent? What or who do you choose not to know?

Can you imagine what the world looks like from the perspective of those on the

margins?

What might it entail for you to be a servant here?

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## Prayer

Creator God who said “Let there be Light”  
and who crafted our eyes to see.

Saviour Jesus who healed with a touch  
and who gives sight beyond seeing.

Holy Spirit who leads us into understanding  
and gives the gift of wisdom  
and of a tender heart.

Triune God help us to truly see  
That the way to the Kingdom  
Comes through service  
That the power for transformation  
Will come with suffering

And give us grace to know that you  
Will accompany us along the way.

Amen