

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

24.10.2021
By Pádraig Ó Tuama

Introduction

Friends, thanks for reading along with Spirituality of Conflict. We are keen to hear from our readers. There are about 1000 people who get this email every week and we have the audacious hope that we could hear from 200 of you. We've got five very simple and short questions for you — it will take you just a minute to do — and it'd really help us as we continue our Spirituality of Conflict planning. [The survey is found by clicking here](#)

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In this week, we meet Bartimaeus; a man who'd gone blind, who wishes to regain his sight. His singularity of purpose, his clarity of heart, his capacity to not be dampened by the weight of language from those who objected to how clearly he communicated his own wishes, all build a story that has as much fortitude as it does self awareness. Bartimaeus poses serious questions of anyone who takes the text seriously: what do you want? What are you willing to do in the name of this wanting? Is it worth it?

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## Text

Mark 10:46–52

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. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 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." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then 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." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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## Comment

The lectionary year is culminating for us, and in this year B, we are in the drama of Mark's terse gospel. Mark's gospel's Galilee ministry has been characterised by quick responses from the people of the region to the liberating — and politically controversial — message from Jesus of Nazareth. However, he is not just interested in social popularity. He has a message, and takes his followers — those formal followers in the disciples, as well as the large crowds who follow him — on a journey towards a deeper discernment about what will nurture a stance of liberation in the face of power.

And it is this that is more difficult for his followers. For some, it seems, the appeal of Jesus was that he was controversial. However, he keeps on asking them *Why*, *Why are you interested in this?* he pushes. He asks them to examine their own motivations and interests. The middle section of Mark's gospel is when Jesus puts increasing demand on those who are following him, asking him who they think he is, what they're willing to do, whether they know what they're doing in following him, and how much they're willing to give up.

The characterising of the disciples in this section is one of loyal followers who are bewildered by this man rumoured to be the Messiah. They are increasingly presented in the narrative as people who are keen to be with Jesus, but who miss the deeper meaning and purpose of his ministry. In depicting the disciples in this way, the gospel writer offers a critique of those who claim to be closest to the source of power, suggesting that these individuals are most at risk of missing the whole point of it all. And — in light of contemporary scandals and abuses — such an awareness of the proximity of power to misunderstanding is a worthwhile self-examination for anyone in leadership to consider.

Jesus of Nazareth would not have been an easy man to please. He put himself under strenuous demands, and seemed to ask the same for his friends. His mood, as Mark's gospel continues, becomes heavy. And he is consumed with what he can see, but what others seem to find oblique: namely that he is not interested in revolution, but rather in repentance and that those who are in most need of repentance may resort to violence against him rather than engagement with him.

It is in this mood and narrative development that the story of Bartimaeus takes place. Mark often — and not without critique from Disability Theology — uses the event of a blind person gaining (or regaining) sight as a metaphor for the kind of conversion of the heart necessary for any new perspective to take root in the heart. Bartimaeus is depicted as someone utterly in possession of his own narrative of desire. He is shouting out for the attention of Jesus, despite the aggression of those around him who seek to quieten him. They are in conflict about someone so lowly — it seems — who dares to think they could shout out to the important man from Nazareth in such a way. However he is not cowed, and when Jesus' attention is gained, Jesus asks him the most remarkable question: "What do you want?"

Bartimaeus' response is that he wishes to see again, to regain the sight from when he lost it. I wonder if Bartimaeus were to have asked the same question of Jesus what *he* would have wanted... to be free from the pressure of being Messiah? to find a way to let his message land without the threat of violence against his person? for his friends to have the conviction of heart that Bartimaeus seems to have? to remain steady in the face of pressure? We don't know, but the energetic depiction of this vivacious character Bartimaeus — who shouts out, knows what he wants, jumps up, and then follows Jesus following the miracle — stands in sharp contrast to the wavering hovering disciples whose conviction seems to be unsteady, and who, by the end, will be consumed by fear.

Bartimaeus is a character in the gospel of Mark whose desire is clear, and in the face of oppression, he knows what he wants. He is praised in the narrative for this conviction of purpose. And Bartimaeus' clarity is one that, perhaps, is worthwhile considering when in any situation of conflict: he knew what he wanted, he was

unambiguous, and in the face of shaming opposition from his fellows, he shouted all the louder. What would it take to have a relationship with the self that, in the face of complication, has a clear understanding of the desired outcome, and therefore a corresponding willingness to pursue it with a whole and undivided heart?

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## Response

In situations of conflict, it may be worthwhile considering Jesus' simple but penetrating question:

What do you want?

Perhaps it may be helpful to understand that often desires come in layers. There may be a first layer of "I want this conflict to be over" but on a deeper exploration of *Why?* there may be another layer, and yet another layer.

So Bartimaeus and Jesus are our imaginative companions in any situation of conflict. What do we want? And why? And why? And why? arriving at a simplicity of purpose, some way of following life, in a way that is not distracted by the divided hearts of those around us who'd wish to quieten us.

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## Prayer

Bartimaeus, you knew  
what you wanted  
and despite the noise  
of the people who told you  
to quieten your desire  
you made your needs known.

May we find the way to our deepest needs too,  
attending to the questions that'll lead us  
along the way,  
finding the fortitude to distance ourselves  
from the superegos that seem to demean us.

Because this is the pathway to the heart  
this is the pathway to courageous living.

Amen.

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## Further Reading

### Survey – five short questions (it'll take two minutes)

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## Spirituality of Conflict Book

The book *What Were You Arguing About Along The Way?* is a newly revised and edited collection of Spirituality of Conflict entries for years A, B and C. This volume contains introductions, reflections, responses and prayers for the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter.

Pat Bennett, the brilliant theologian, scientist and liturgist (and part of the Spirituality of Conflict team since it began) has spent hundreds of hours reading through the entries, selecting and editing those entries that work well together, and compiling them together in a volume of resources that is rich with support for everyone, whether using it in preparation for preaching, or for personal or group learning.

It'll be released from Canterbury Press in late November this year, just in time for Advent.

The ISBN is 978-1-78622-399-9

You'll be able to get it from all good bookshops, or online venues.

If you can order directly from Canterbury Press, or through your local bookshop, we'd be extra pleased!