

# Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

## Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from October 25, 2009

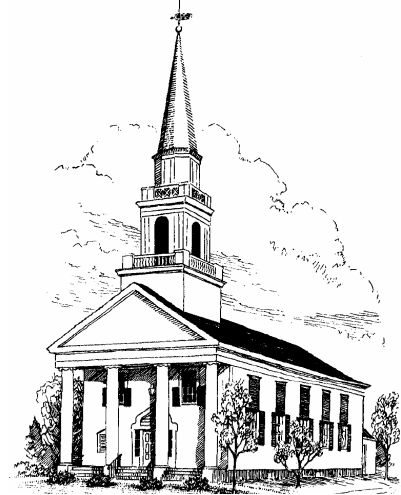
Rev. Ann M. Aaberg

### “Cluelessness to Cognizance”

Scriptures:

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Mark 10:46-52



Those of you who have observed small children are probably familiar with this phenomenon. The child trips or falls and incurs a slight injury—perhaps a little bump on the head or a mild scrape on the knee. Or maybe no injury at all, except embarrassment or wounded pride. If the child’s parent is nowhere around, somehow our little people manage to shake it off, suck it up, hold it in and bravely go back to their toys. But as soon as Mom or Dad appear on the scene, the little one springs up, runs with arms outstretched to the parent, bellowing or wailing loudly, many times with real tears. The babysitter or the daycare provider or the preschool teacher or even Grandma or Grandpa will scratch their heads, “He was just fine. He fell hours ago! He was just fine until you got here.”

We wonder how long the blind beggar Bartimaeus has been sitting by the roadside. Months? Years? Did he sleep in the same spot? Or did he live somewhere else? Did he go back to where he lived each night with the small amount of food or coin he managed to collect to get through another day? Did he make it back and forth to this spot by the roadside by himself or did he need someone with sight to guide him? How long had he managed to hold in his misery? Misery from losing his sight, unable to make a living, cast off by society to the side of the road, ignored, stifled, scorned, begging just to stay alive.

But Bartimaeus could hear. As he sat begging on the side of the road, he could not see, but he could hear those traveling on their way in and out of Jericho, on this secondary road to the city of Jerusalem, about 13 miles away. He could hear daily the voices and crunching footsteps and conversations, and today he hears a large crowd leaving Jericho, a large crowd in the midst of whom was Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth. We read: When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, all that holding in and holding on and stuffing down and getting by and getting through bubbled up much like the child who held on all day until Mommy arrived. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, Bartimaeus knew that the one who could heal him was near.

Just like the child who knows that *this* adult above all else knows him best. This one I can run to and let go of the brave front I’ve put on all afternoon. This one will sympathize immediately. This one will gather me up in his arms and hear my cries and comfort me and say, “There, there, don’t cry, you’ll be all right.” This one will kiss my wound. This one loves me the best. This one I need only run to. I don’t have to explain a thing. Just run towards him and put my arms around his knees and he will pick me up and I will be healed. This one will stop everything to bend down towards me.

Bartimaeus shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And he felt the large crowd brush past him and heard stern voices telling him to be quiet. Son of David, have mercy on me! And

we read, Jesus stood still. Jesus stood still. The hurried footsteps, the voices, the movement of the crowd stops. Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here."

And just like the child who springs up from the floor, leaving his toys in mid-play at the sound of his long-awaited parent's voice, Bartimaeus, throwing off his cloak, sprang up and ran to Jesus.

Bartimaeus, the blind beggar sitting on the side of the road, is the first person in the gospel of Mark who calls Jesus, the Son of David, signifying his understanding of who Jesus is, the descendant of the royal house of David, the Anointed One. This understanding on the part of Bartimaeus is in stark contrast to the misunderstanding on the part of Jesus' closely connected disciples who have not been clear on the concept throughout Jesus' repeated and patient teachings.

And this morning we hear Jesus ask Bartimaeus the very same question, word for word, that he asked James and John, two of his disciples, just days ago: "What do you want me to do for you? What do you want me to do for you?" James and John answered with a request for important cabinet posts in Jesus' new administration: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Bartimaeus answers, "My teacher, Rabbouni, let me see again." Cynthia Jarvis, a minister at the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia writes this of these two responses:

"The one answer rests on well-established religious laurels, the other petition issues from darkness and doubt; the one request would sidestep suffering, the other is forged out of loss, exclusion, and helplessness; the one is bent on an exclusive claim to righteousness, the other is bowed down in need before the Son who alone is righteous."

Bartimaeus gets it, and he is the first person healed by Jesus in the gospel of Mark who immediately follows him on the way. His faith recognized the sound of Jesus' voice. His faith told him who Jesus truly was. His faith swelled up from the depths of his aching heart and burst through his throat into his unabashed cry for mercy to the only one who would truly hear him and understand. His faith gave him the courage to throw off his cloak and spring up from the ground on the side of the road and go to Jesus. His faith motivated his honest and raw request to his teacher. Bartimaeus' faith made him well. Bartimaeus' faith allowed him to *see*, while Jesus' inner circle of disciples came up time and time again spiritually blind.

Maybe it's because we're New Englanders. Maybe it's our macho culture. Maybe crying out for anything is seen as weakness. Or maybe we've just forgotten what it was like to be small children and in our misery and fright to run to the one adult who would comfort us, no questions asked. Maybe we've forgotten who Jesus is.

When I delivered my first child, my roommate in the hospital was another mother who had just delivered her first baby, too. Unfortunately, she was dealing with post-partum complications, including incessant bleeding and anemia and difficulty nursing and pain. Her attitude was one of patience and practical strength as I observed her interact with the nurses, and her friends as they streamed in to visit, and even her husband who came to her bedside at night after work. On the afternoon of the second day, the patient's mother walked into our room and this brave new mother collapsed in tears at the sight of her, softly sobbing into her arms "Mommy, it hurts."

Jesus, have mercy on me. Jesus, help me. Jesus, heal me. With Jesus, we need not maintain a stiff upper lip. With Jesus we can let go of our false independence and our misguided self-reliance. We don't need to cling to our toys, fiercely concentrating on them for fear of falling apart. With Jesus, we can throw off the cloaks which cover up our faith and we can spring up unashamed and ask him for new sight, new direction, new understanding. We can ask him to point us on the way. Go, your faith will make you well. Amen.