

Yell Until You're Heard

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Mark 10:46-52

Reformation Sunday

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Movement 1 – Held Down/Blinded By the World

Have you ever had that feeling that you are blind? Have you ever had that feeling like you are running the very same rat race day in and day out? It is that feeling that you are stuck in the same, mundane routine, and it feels like it is going nowhere. You get up, you go to work, you go home, and repeat. It is like the automobile commercial where the husband walks in the same steps every day. He kisses his wife on the cheek on the same place every day. He is stuck in the same pattern and the same routine, and it seems to be going nowhere. Have you ever had that feeling, like you have been stuck in a cycle of rainy days; day one – rain, day two – rain, day three – rain, and repeat and repeat.

When I was hiking the Appalachian Trail, I meet a hiker who had the same meal every night. Every night he had Mac and Cheese. He had bought over 100 boxes and kept track of each box that he ate. He kept track, because when he got to the end of that supply, then he had a supply of 100 plus packages of Ramen Noodles waiting to become his meal every night. I remember watching him mechanically set up his stove and make his Mac and Cheese. I remember watching him sigh as he brought up his fork for the 87th time to once again eat Mac and Cheese. He was stuck.

I'm not talking about every routine, because some are good and healthy, but I mean the patterns that hold us down. Here was this person who was walking through God's great and beautiful wilderness, and all he could think about was the next Mac and Cheese dinner that he was going to have to force down. It was as if he was blinded by his own routine. Have you ever felt that way, that there is more to life, but you feel like you are being held down, or blinded from seeing it? In the movie *As Good As It Gets*, Jack Nicholson's character lives with an intense obsessive-compulsive disorder. It is a disorder that is geared toward order, routine, and ritual, and it controls his life. There is one scene when he bursts into his therapist's office and cries out, "is this it, is this as good as it gets." He recognized how his life was held down by his obsessive desire for control and routine.

In our faith it is easy to be stuck. Our religious life is based upon ritual and routine and it is easy to get stuck. We often get stuck in our prayers, our expectations, and even our worship. Some day, take a moment and listen to a congregation read a written prayer, or say the Lord's Prayer. We sound like robots, like we are just going through the prayers by not living them. It is almost as if our routines are holding us back from truly seeing what the prayers have to offer.

Think of the blind man, Bartimaeus, who cries out to see just as everyone else can see. Day after day, he stumbles through the streets of Jericho and manages to find his place on the outskirts of town. Day after day he asks for money so that he can live to ask again tomorrow. You can imagine him sitting and begging and thinking, "this isn't living." You can imagine his blindness taking over more than his eyes, but his feeling that he cannot see the passion and the joy that life has to offer. Yet what else can he do? He has to make money to live, and he can't see, so he must spend his life sitting on the road leading out of Jericho and begging for money. He is stuck and blind in the routine of life.

It is easy to be sucked into the routine and the ritual and to only half-live life. It is easy to find ourselves stuck into a pattern that seems to blind us and keep us from fully living. Like we are walking in the mud, like we are stuck in the drudge, we wallow through life half living. Have you ever had that feeling like you just are seeing all that life has to offer? Have you ever found yourself mouthing the same prayer without even thinking about it? Have you ever had that feeling that you aren't seeing all that life has to offer; have you ever felt that you are living life blind?

Movement 2 – That Glimpse of Glory

Have you had that moment when you felt that greatness was near? Every now and then, something breaks through the mundane and we feel a glimpse of something greater than us. Have you had that moment when you felt that something good, something great could happen? Like going into a kitchen and smelling all of the good food cooking, you know that a great meal is near. Or when you hear a famous musician practicing before a concert, you know that something great is coming. It is that moment when you are driving towards Disney Land, and you can see the spirals and the shapes in the distance, you know that you are near. You feel your heart quicken, you sit up in your seat, and you get ready for the greatness that you are about to experience. You know that greatness is near.

It is brushing up against; it is touching the cloak, but not fully experiencing the person, the food, the music, or the experience. It is a glimpse of the glory, although not fully experiencing the glory. I remember when I was in Washington D.C. this summer I went to the Ford Theater and saw the booth where Lincoln was shot. Then I went to the basement and saw bits of his clothes, one of the pillows, casts of his face, pictures, and many other bits of memorabilia. With that fateful night on my mind and on my heart I went across the street to the very house where Lincoln was taken when he was shot. I stood in the room and looked at the very bed where Lincoln lay when he took his last breath. That night I went to the Lincoln Memorial, read the Gettysburg address and the Second Inaugural address, stared at the giant statute, and began to imagine who this person, Abraham Lincoln, might have been. I felt as if all that day I have been brushing up against his life. I felt as if all that day I have been catching a glimpse of Abraham Lincoln. I had that experience that I was brushing up against greatness.

Jesus walked by Bartimaeus. Jesus walked by him with a throng of people. Jesus walked by Bartimaeus, and Bartimaeus knew that he had just brushed by greatness. Maybe he heard people talking about Jesus. Maybe he noticed the crowd treated him differently. Maybe he had a quickening of the heart as Jesus walked by, but Bartimaeus knew that he have just had a glimpse, as best as a blind man could have a glimpse, of the holy one.

Have you ever had that glimpse? It is that glimpse of the divine. That brush with the Holy. It is that moment when you can almost feel the Holy Spirit rushing around you. It is that moment when you know, and you can feel that Christ is close. Have you ever had that moment when you felt as if you could almost reach out and touch the Lord, because he feels that close? The philosopher, Kierkegaard claims that the moment of the divine is when the holy intersects with the secular. John Caputo describes it as an “event,” a moment that breaks through the ordinary and becomes extra-ordinary. It is a moment when God breaks into the real, and you can almost glimpse the glory of the Lord. Maybe you are in the midst of prayer, but you can't go all the way. Maybe you can feel something working in you, but you still can't put your finger on it. Maybe you are in the midst of a conversation, and you can glimpse the presence of the Lord, but you still cannot see the Lord. A shaft of light breaks into our darkness, our blindness, and we can

feel that greatness is indeed near. Have you ever had that moment, that glimpse of God's glory, and have you found yourself yearning for more?

Movement 3 – When the Church Holds us Back from Glory

But so often we are held back. So often we are stuck, we are kept back, or something prevents us from reaching out and touching Jesus. We want to shout out in prayer, but someone next to us, or a voice inside of us exhorts quite. We want to hold the silence a little longer because we can hear God calling us, but something says “no”. Think of the Bartimaeus crying out to Jesus. He knows that Christ is close, and shouts out to him, but is told to be quiet. He knows that the Lord has just passed by, he has had his brush with greatness, but he is told to stay still and to be quiet. One translation has the crowd saying, “shut up!” He is held back by the disciples, by the crowd, by the very ones who are walking with Jesus. It is like we are driving to Disney World, and we see it in the distance, but then the car turns a different direction, and we find ourselves going away from Disney World. We shout, “turn” but no one will listen.

Have been times when you knew you were close to Jesus but you did not feel that you could go all the way to experience the bliss of the Lord. You have brushed up against Jesus, but something is still holding you back from making that full commitment. Sometimes it is our very own culture, sometimes it is the church that holds us back. Martin Luther was in a similar situation (as well as other reformers). He knew he was close to experiencing the grace of God, but at the time the church was teaching that we must work for our justification. At the time, the church was teaching that if you sin, then you need to pay a penance, or to work off you sin. Yet when Luther read the epistle of Romans, as well as other parts of the Bible, and could feel the greatness of the grace of God. He had brushed by the greatness, but was held back. He was like the blind Bartimaeus who knew that Jesus was near, who shouted to see Jesus, but was held back by the institution. At that time, the Catholic Church would not allow the possibility of grace alone meriting salvation. It contributed to the blindness, just as the crowd and the disciples contributed to the blindness of Bartimaeus. The church and the crowd held Luther and Bartimaeus back from glory.

We must ask ourselves if the church today has become a fence around Christ. Are we stuck in our customs and our traditions that they are holding people back? Is our blindness self-inflicted? Have we become so closely connected to our identity, our way of doing church that we will not allow someone to reach out and touch Jesus if it is not our way? We must ask ourselves if we are holding people back. We must ask ourselves if we are being held back. When Jonathan Edwards became a part of a revival movement in the 1750s other church tried to hold him and others back. When Roger Williams wanted to push the idea of freedom for Christ, others tried to hold him back. The church has a history of holding people back, and it is very possible that we are doing the same today. Our expectations, our assumptions, even the way we worship may be a barrier to our connection with Christ. How might we, as a church be holding people back from the divine glory of God?

Or maybe it is within. Maybe there is something within you that holds you back from seeing Jesus. After all, are you sure you are ready for that grace? Are you sure that you are ready for that glory? What if it is more than you can handle? What if a full experience with Christ is overwhelming? Who will catch you, and walk with you after that moment? Let me ask you, can you see the church as a place that will support you in your journey and growth in faith? Can you see this community as a place that will lift you up when you fall into grace? If not, then what

needs to change? How can we give you the assurance that you need not hold back from reaching out to Christ?

How might we be held back from reaching out and touching that glory?

Movement 4 – Yell Until You're Heard

Let me call you to be persistent. Let me call you to keep on yelling for Christ. Let me call you to never give up, but to continue to reach out for the hem of Christ's garment, no matter what blocks are in your way. Look at Bartimaeus, sitting on the side of the road, being told by others, people who were probably in a social class or two over him to be quiet. He couldn't see, so he shouted, and the disciples were taking away his voice as well. The barrier may have seemed insurmountable, and Jesus was walking away. How long would it be until Jesus was out of earshot? How long would it be until the voices of the crowd would overtake Bartimaeus' voice? Maybe Bartimaeus was getting anxious and nervous. But Bartimaeus did not give up. He kept on yelling, he kept on shouting, and he kept on demanding that he would be heard. He was persistent, because he needed to touch and experience the divine.

Let us be the same. Let us be persistent in experiencing Christ. We will face barriers like "we have never done it that way before." We will face pitfalls like, "it isn't that kind of church." We will face walls like, "that isn't the proper way to understand worship." The church has again and again put up the mantra like walls to stop any and all reformers who were pushing to truly and experience Christ, but we need to be persistent.

In the movie, *Better off Dead*, one character is persistent, the newspaper boy. He wanted to collect his two-dollar tip, and hounded John Cusack's character. He was found in the park, he was found on the street, and he was even found on the top of a black diamond slope riding his bicycle and demanding his two dollars. The newspaper boy was persistent, and wouldn't give up.

That is the same way we need to be with our worship and with our faith. We need to break through the glass that is holding you back and yell until we are heard. Be persistent, be constant, and keep reaching for that glory which Christ offers.

It is like trying to get through to a real person when calling the phone company. You have to be persistent. It is like getting the attention of a politician (if you don't have a ton of money). You have to be persistent.

Be persistent with Christ! Don't let the structures of the church or of the world hold you back from Christ. Don't let your own fears hold you back from Christ. Yell until you're heard. Shout until you can't be denied.

Movement 5 – Christ's Question and Our Answer

And finally Christ will reach out to you. This is the exciting and the fearful moment of our perseverance. That Christ will reach out to you and ask, "What do you want me to do for you." It is fearful because now you will have to answer. Now everything is on the line. Now your prayer has been answered, and you have to follow through. Imagine what must have gone through Bartimaeus' mind when he heard that Jesus was calling him. Imagine what he must have been thinking as he found his way to Jesus' presence. Now he had to put his money where his mouth was. He cried out for mercy, he even named Jesus for who he fully and truly was, and now Jesus asks, "what do you want me to do for you." It is like that moment when a child asks again and again for attention, and when you give it, the child becomes shy and has nothing to say. It is like that moment when you keep saying things need to change, and you would do things differently if you were in charge, and the next day you are put in charge. Now the ball is in your

court, now you have to follow through. Why is it that you want to encounter Jesus? What is it that you are seeking when you were so persistently trying to reach out and touch the hem of the divine's garment? The early reformers complained that the Catholic Church had too many restriction and rules, and eventually they found themselves with their own church, and they went a little crazy with their power. For example some of the reformers argued that the "real" church should be void of every symbols and statutes, lights and fonts. So they cleaned out the church. When Martin Luther saw this he was furious, and wanted to make a point. One Sunday he only had one candle burning in the Sanctuary, and it was nearly impossible to see. The next Sunday he had all the candles he could find burning bright as the sun. The extremes in the understanding of the church were wrong.

It is a dangerous moment because our conviction could waver, our bravado could diminish, and we could fall short of the glory we seek. We could meekly ask for better health. We could ask for wealth or for power, but these are things of the world. When Jesus hears your call, and responds, what are you going to say? For what are you going to ask?

I remember when I was working with another church I was complaining about the worship service. The hymns just weren't right. The sermons weren't doing what they needed to do, and the music seemed to be lacking something. I felt like I could almost touch the glory of the Lord, but not quiet. Finally, one day someone asked me, what would I do differently, and I didn't know what to say. They asked me what I hoped to gain by changing the worship service, and I answered, "an opportunity to stand before Christ." We need an opportunity not to yell louder, not to shout amen, but to stand before Christ. We need an opportunity not to sing classical music, not to say our prayers in unison, but to stand before Christ. I don't care how we get there, but that is where we need to go as a church and as individuals. We all need to stand before our Lord and hear that questions, "what do you want me to do for you?"

What do we want, but to be able to see! What is it that Christ offers but grace. Can you accept that grace which allows you to see life with hope and freedom? Now that you have heard Christ calling you, ask for the grace which is offered, ask for the forgiveness which is at hand, ask to be able to see. That is what we ask for, and that is what we need, the grace of Christ. Karl Barth says that grace is something not that we ask for, it is not something that we earn, but something that we receive. We are called to receive the grace of Christ. Say "yes" to that grace. Ask Christ for that opportunity to say yes to that grace. This is what the reformers were pushing for, whether it be the Lutherans, the Calvinists, the Anabaptists, or the others, they were all looking to let people say "yes" to Christ without any holds, without any barriers or anything holding us back. Bartimaeus asks for his sight, and we ask for life. That is what is offered through God's grace, life. Christ offers a life that breaks out of the routine, that is not stuck in the day in and day out, but a life that is truly lived as God intended us to live. Say yes to grace and accept the life. Keep yelling until you are heard by Christ, until you can stand before Christ and say "yes" to the grace that is already offered.

Movement 6 – No Choice but to Follow

And when we say "yes" to God's grace, we will have no choice but to follow Jesus. We aren't forced to follow Jesus, but the grace of God and the love and mercy of Christ compels us to follow Jesus. It is that feeling of freedom that you have that compels you to follow Jesus. And it is because now we can truly see. No one told Bartimaeus that he had to follow Jesus, but Bartimaeus followed anyways because he could see. He was called by Jesus, he had faith in Jesus, and he followed Jesus. This is the model of the disciple, to be called, to have faith and to

follow. This is what we yearn for, to hear Christ's call, to proclaim our faith and accepting Christ's grace, and then to follow Jesus. And when you say "yes" to Christ, nothing else makes sense. You can't imagine doing anything else but staying with Christ. You can't imagine anything else important but following Jesus.

We can now see. We can now see what life can be when lived in the way of Jesus. We can now see who we can be when we follow Jesus. Now we can see the life that God has called us to live. Now we can see. Maybe you can see yourself working with the ministries of this church. Maybe you can see yourself working with the children, visiting members who cannot be here, or helping to take care of the poor. Maybe you can see yourself trying to live as an example for others in your place of work. Maybe you can see yourself embracing a ministry of prayer. Maybe you can see yourself walking closely with Jesus, learning the scriptures, developing your prayer life and trying to be the disciple that Christ calls you to become as you follow him. I don't know what you will see, but I know that through the grace of God through Jesus Christ our eyes are opened, we can see, and we are called to follow Christ on the way.

Every now and then I meet someone who is thinking about going into the ministry. For some reason this person feels that he or she has the call to ordained ministry. Every time I meet someone with that call, I tell them that if they can do anything else, then they should. If they can sell books, pave streets, fix pipes, crunch numbers, practice medicine or law, then they should. But if that person cannot then the ministry is right. If that person cannot see him or her self in any other situation or any other vocation then the ministry is right.

I think the same is true for Christianity. If you can do anything else, then do it. But if you say yes to Christ, then you will not be able to see yourself in any other life. You will remember your old life, the life of blindness and restriction, and will not be able to go back. We will together follow Christ. Our whole life will be filled by the love of Christ and we will follow Christ.

There have been times when the church has held us back from seeing. There have been times when the Saints before us have had to shout and demand that they could see the risen Lord in whom they had such faith. Then their eyes were opened and they could see!

How can we go back to the way of blindness when we are shown the way of forgiveness? How can we go back to the way of drudgery when we are shown the way of mercy? How can we go back to a life of selfishness when we are shown the way of love? Christ opens our eyes to the way, and we cannot do anything else but follow. We can see!

My brothers and sisters, we want to see, do not let any institution keep you from seeing Christ and walking with Christ. Let Christ into your heart, let your faith in Christ make you full and make you whole. And let us all become the church which holds none back from the grace of Christ. Let us be the church that is not on our way but is on Christ's way. Let us be the church that reforms to the will of God. And we shall see the Glory of the Lord.

AMEN