

Brazen Faith
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Faith is a tricky thing. Some days it can flow through you like a river, and warm your soul like that first really bright and warm spring day. Do you know the kinds of days I mean? Sometimes things just go your way. You're physically well. Everything is running smoothly at work and among your family members. Your friends are in touch regularly, and you spend wonderful evenings with them from time to time. You feel really lucky. Blessings pile up on your door, and everywhere you turn there are little reminders of just how close by God is. It's hard *not* to have faith on days like those. Wouldn't it be great if every day was just like that?

But they aren't all like that, are they? No; because there are *all sorts* of days. On certain days we *may* feel God working in our lives *sometimes*, but it is mixed up with some struggles that can challenge or overwhelm those feelings of God's presence. And then there are *those days*. *Those other days* when it is just one thing after another—illness, a toilet overflows, a pet gets sick on your favorite quilt, the car breaks down, you struggle in your relationships, you start breaking out, you're late everywhere you go... *and that's just the first half of the day, which goes steadily downhill from there...* you overdraw your checking account—*again*, your kids bring home “Fs” from school, *your* job security is shaky while the big boss gets *another huge* bonus, your child needs to be rushed to the emergency room, your parents are having a hard time, a beloved friend passes away *way* too young... friends, have you had *one of those* days? (repeat as needed) Sometimes it feels like life is just trying to pick on us. It can be really hard to find your faith on a day like that. Faith *is* a tricky thing, even a fickle thing. Some days nothing can shake it, and other days you couldn't find it with a microscope...

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Faith is held and demonstrated in a variety of ways in this morning's reading. Jesus again shows his unshakable faith in God, which allows him to participate in healing Bartimaeus of his blindness.

Christ's Disciples demonstrate their faith in Jesus, and God, by helping Bartimaeus find his way to be healed. They even have words of encouragement for him along the way: “Take heart; get up, he *is* calling you.”¹ The Disciples do good work here. Isn't that a nice change?

Then there are those *other people* in the crowd who want to work against the faith which Bartimaeus shows when he shouts out “*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*”² Those folks—those unnamed ne'er-do-wells—try to talk down the blind man. They shout. They sternly order

¹ Mark 10:49d.

² Mark 10:47c.

him to be quiet. Because they know the score. They know that old Bart is wretched, so why on earth would Jesus want anything to do with him? They feel *right* telling him to shut up, they feel justified.

But it doesn't stop good old Bart, not for a second. In fact, he gets even louder and shouts again: "*Son of David, have mercy on me!*"³ It is a courageous act for Bart to shout out for Christ's attention. It flies squarely in the face of the social order of the day. It demonstrates a deep and abiding faith that Jesus *can* help him, no matter what the others say. His faith in Jesus is nothing short of *brazen*.

As a blind man, Bartimaeus was reduced to a life of begging. The culture of that time was simply **not** progressive about illness. It was assumed that any sort of health problem—from passing colds to long term illnesses or disabilities—were a sign of disfavor in God's eyes. In more long term cases, it went without saying that those ill people were beset *by demons*: possessed; unclean; untouchable. And not only that, but they were contagious, too. Going anywhere near Bartimaeus might just make *you* blind, too.

So, no one would go near him, or any of the others who gathered on the roadsides outside of towns and cities *begging* simply to *live*. Many people passed by day and night, and ignored all the cries for help. Now, we all know *those days* where everything goes wrong, and we know they can challenge our faith. Can you imagine what *life*—not just a day, or two or ten—but life as a blind man would be like in *that* culture? You might expect Bartimaeus to lay down and withdraw completely, just to escape his isolation and being feared. But he doesn't, does he? To the contrary, Bartimaeus displays a deep faith. Even with all his burdens, Bart found a way to hold onto his faith. He held it so well that when Jesus healed him, he said to Bart: "*your* faith has made you well."⁴ Not Christ's faith. Not the Disciples' faith. But Bart's own brazen faith is what healed him.

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Friends, where are *you* in this story? Where is *your faith* today? Are you, *like Jesus*, so sure in your faith that miracles are worked out through you? Are you helping others to find their way to Jesus to be healed, or to become Disciples? Are you shouting down people when they express *their* faith? Are you crying out to Jesus for healing?

Now, let me say clearly that there is no *wrong* place to be in this story; or in any Bible story. We all find ourselves in different places at different times in our lives. Sometimes we can even be in several different places throughout one day. And these stories are meant for us to encounter throughout our whole lives. It is *all* okay.

³ Mark 10: 48c.

⁴ Mark 10:52c.

For my own sake, I don't know if I have ever been in Jesus place in the story, or if I ever will be. For one thing, I had hoped to spontaneously start to walk on water once I became a minister. }But it didn't work out. { Now, admittedly, *Jesus* is a tough act to follow. Are any of you with Jesus today?

So, if I am not with Jesus in the story, where am I? I *would* like to think that I help people to find their ways to Jesus from time to time. And I must witness to the fact that I certainly see that in your own good examples. Not least among those who brought friends or family members along today. That's walking the faith, folks, well done! (Give your selves a little shout out, or round of applause...) So, some among us are walking with the Disciples through today's story.

I am still unsure of *my* place, though. I have to admit that *sometimes* I *have* shouted down people for expressing their faith. And I can't promise I will stop that, although I hope I do it for the right reasons. After all, there are some understandings of faith which belittle women, or look down on different ethnicities or cultures, or call lesbians and gays sinners rather than beloved children of God, or otherwise build walls and cast judgments. Now, I feel called by Jesus to shout down *those ways of being religious*. I think it is *right* to challenge injustice whether it hides behind politics, religion, cultural norms or business as usual. But, I don't think that's what the folks in today's story were up to.

Now, I have to admit, that there have been many, many times when I have called out to Jesus for healing: most memorably because of a broken heart; or for other broken relationships; and sometimes just to be a better person. It is part of what prayer is all about: shouting out: "God help me!" So, maybe I stand closest to Bartimaeus today, or at least I can relate to him the best overall.

We *all* need help sometimes. We all shout people down once in awhile. I can see among us that many of us help others to Jesus. Maybe on a great day we help open up some space for someone to know grace in their lives, too. So, *wherever* we are in today's story is simply part of being human. We all travel through different positions of faith at one time of another.

And there is more to today's story. It serves to remind us that *whenever we* are in deep need; whenever *we* feel like the world is shunning us, whenever we feel isolated and set apart from community, we *can* lift our voices to God. Now it may be that certain folks will try to shout us down. *But don't listen to them!* Take *heart*, Jesus *is* listening to us. We may have to repeat ourselves before we feel heard. We may be shouted down once, or twice, or dozens, or even hundreds, of times, but, Jesus *is listening* to us.

And Jesus is doing more than *just* listening to us. Jesus is calling us *to him*. Now, admittedly, *sometimes* his call gets lost amid the jeers of those who would challenge our faithful crying out. But there are also those among us who are *ready* to help us with words of support and encouragement to guide us to Jesus. There are people who will say “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”⁵ And friends, that is *us*: that’s the church. We are all called to remind *everyone* to take heart. We are called to let everyone know that Jesus is calling *them*. Even when it seems like we all may be lost in personal sorrows, *there is a place* where we can all know healing. Even when it seems that the world is turned against us, Jesus is calling all of us into *wholeness*. And not just to people *outside* the church, but to everyone within it, too. We are all called to travel with Jesus *on the way*.

This community is here for us when we feel like we are showered with blessings and on those days when we couldn’t find our faith with a microscope. In our gratitude, in our sorrow, in our joy and our fears, ours is a place—and *we are a people*—that will love and support *everyone* in their journey with Jesus. In providing for one another, we help support a shared faith which persists in the face of opposition, even when we fear we may falter. Together we can build a brazen faith to overcome all obstacles. We can help each other to know God’s fullness and peace, *even in times of trial, illness and other estrangements*. We *can* cast off everything that keeps us blind to God’s light in our lives, and then we can follow Jesus *on the way* to spiritual wholeness.

Good and loving God, let our shared faith be deep and brazen!

Can I get an Amen?

Mark 10:46-52

46They 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. 47When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” 48Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” 49Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” 50So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51Then 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.” 52Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

⁵ Mark 10:49d.

Today is Reformation Sunday, the day that Protestant denominations traditionally set aside to remember our common heritage. It commemorates the date in October 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg cathedral protesting the excesses of the Catholic church of his day.

One of the most important (and often overlooked) results of the Protestant Reformation was the reemergence of congregational hymn singing. For over 1000 years, the common people were prohibited from singing in church. Only the clergy and professional singers could do this. The music was always sung in Latin; never in the vernacular language of the people. The contributions of Martin Luther and his followers in producing new hymn tunes and texts cannot be overstated. The German chorale hymns revolutionized classical music and gave rise to later composers such as J. S. Bach.

But the Lutherans were not the first congregational hymn writers. That distinction belongs to the Moravians of Central Europe. In 2007 these followers of the martyred reformer John Hus celebrated 550 years of their founding in 1457. Moravians are credited with producing the first hymnal in 1501. The Moravians are a "mainstream" Protestant denomination in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Pennsylvanians are perhaps more familiar with the Moravians since they settled in the Lehigh valley and founded the cities of Bethlehem and Nazareth.