

Sermon - 22nd Sunday after Pentecost

Mark 10:46-52

October 24, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Maggie Kuhn. Has anyone heard her name before? Maggie, a native of Buffalo, NY, was an American activist who founded the Gray Panthers movement in 1970 after she was forced to retire from her job because she had reached the then-mandatory retirement age of 65. In the years following, the Gray Panthers became known for advocating nursing home reform and fighting ageism. While their advocacy led to Congress banning a mandatory retirement age in 1986, the Gray Panthers to this day have continued to fight for human rights, social and economic justice, and global peace. Maggie, a fierce organizer who offered advice to others seeking social change, famously said, "Leave safety behind. Put your body on the line. Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind – even if your voice shakes. When you least expect it, someone may actually listen to what you have to say."

Speak your mind – even if your voice shakes. Have you ever done that? Spoken up with a tremor in your voice? Do you know that feeling? Maybe it happened when you courageously stood in front of a group of peers to tell them a deep truth about your life. You were afraid, but you also knew that it needed to be shared. Or maybe when you stepped into your boss' office with the speech that you had rehearsed over and over again about how you disagreed with the direction the company was heading. Or when you finally told your friends where you really stood on a controversial topic. You uttered the words with truth, honesty, and passion, yet also with fear and vulnerability. And your voice was shaking. Isn't it an act of hope to do such a thing? Hoping that someone just might hear you. Hoping that something just might change.

In our gospel story today, we don't know if Bartimaeus' voice was shaking or not when he shouted out to Jesus as the crowd was passing by him. What we do know is that he is blind, having lost his sight at some point earlier in his life; he is sitting on the side of the road between Jericho and Jerusalem; and, because he is considered by society to be among the poorest of the poor, he is invisible to most passersby. Most days those who passed by would move along quickly, wanting to avoid even looking at this destitute beggar.

It is no different on this day for Bartimaeus, as we hear that the crowd – this very crowd of Jesus followers, this crowd of people who have listened to Jesus teach and preach – want to ignore him. After all, in their eyes he is not worthy of Jesus' attention and time. Remember from last week's text that Jesus is heading to Jerusalem, and Jesus has

already told his followers not once, but three times!, what is going to happen to him there. Anxious about what is ahead for their teacher and friend, they are most likely consumed with fear and anxiety, leaving little to no room to have compassion for others.

Are we, present followers of Jesus, any different from the crowd of Jesus' followers that day 21 centuries ago on the road to Jerusalem? In this time of fear and anxiety, who are those we have little compassion for in our society, whose voices we try to silence? Especially in this politically divisive time in our country, are they the voices of those whose political views are opposite ours? As our demographics shift, are they the voices of people having a different skin color who are speaking out about current injustices as well as centuries-old racial inequalities? Are they the voices of those that spurred Maggie Kuhn to activism – those of the elderly, women, the disabled, LBGTQIA, and other vulnerable segments of our society?

Bartimaeus will not let the crowd silence him, as he hears that Jesus is coming. He keeps shouting, *"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."* Do you notice that he doesn't ask Jesus for money, or for a place to stay, or even for something to eat? He asks for what we all need; he asks for mercy. For love and acceptance as he is.

This is where the story overflows with grace, for both Bartimaeus and the crowd. Jesus could have been angered by the response of the crowd, realizing that they obviously have not learned compassion and mercy for others from him. Instead, he gives the crowd a second chance, holding out hope that they can still be taught about grace and mercy. After he stands still and hears Bartimaeus' cries, he says to the crowd, *"Call him to me."* And, apparently, the crowd learns this time, as they offer beautiful words which fall upon Bartimaeus' ears, *"Bartimaeus, take heart. Get up. Jesus is calling you."* Jesus then asks what he can do for Bartimaeus. Hearing Bartimaeus' desire to see again, Jesus heals him. Jesus also restores him to community, as now Bartimaeus joins the others "on the road" with Jesus to suffering and death, and to resurrection and ultimate glory.

Whether we are Bartimaeus or one of the crowd, Jesus will not abandon us, either. He listens to our cries, as well as giving us second, third, and more opportunities to act as he does. In the waters of baptism God has gifted us with his Holy Spirit, empowering us to both find our voice to speak and seek changes for a more just world, as well as to listen to the desperate cries of others and act, as Jesus Christ has shown us – with compassion, grace, and mercy. In doing so, Christ is able to heal us and this broken, yet beloved world. May it be so. Amen.