

Story of the Missing Man

One of the most important, and perhaps under told, aspects of the Bible is that it is a collection of stories about people pining to be made whole. From the very beginning to the last chapters of Revelation, it is the story of humanity reaching out to God. Broken story after broken story tells of love wasted, of greed, of people trying to get “their own,” all the while paying the price, feeling the hurt, seeking something more.

What we seek is *Shalom*. In Hebrew this word carries a mountain of meaning: perfection, wholeness, peace, completeness. It is all-together shalom. Shalom, by one way of looking at it would be the culmination of being perfectly connected and at rest in the life of the divine.

When things go off the rails we look to God to be made right. We are all stories. We are stories of what was and what is. We are stories of what could have been (what should have been) and what will be. If scripture is to be trusted, the basic arc of creation is that all things lead toward Shalom.

This leads us to Bartimaeus, a man whose story seems to end when he finds “shalom.” Bartimaeus, the missing man, starts out all *too* known. He is a blind beggar living in the oldest city in the world. His story is one of “nots.” He is a have not who cannot see, pushed to the margins of society he is rebuked for trying to call out to Jesus. He is too unimportant, too little a thing, for this famous preacher’s attention. But he cries out and gets the attention of this divine man. He asks for healing and gets it.

Funny, but, this is the last we hear of Bartimaeus.

Most of the disciples get called, get named, and go off doing stuff, making mistakes and trying to be more holy, but live on in the *Acts of the Apostles*. Bartimaeus just disappears from the record. So, where does he go?

Mark gives us a thread to follow, and to be honest, Mark may be trying to make a very important point. The clue we get is this, “followed him on the way.” This line is telling us something very important. Early Christians were called a lot of things before this particular nomenclature stuck, Nazarenes, for one, but also “followers of the Way.”

Jesus talks so much in the Gospels about following a certain path or way of living that leads to the presence of God, and this idea was formative for the early Church. Let’s get back to Mark for a moment. Mark’s gospel is notable for much, but one important thing is that Mark sort of “beats up” the disciples. He seems to have a very low opinion of the disciples, or any of our ability to follow Jesus and the way of life Jesus invites us to live. The splashy disciples make a lot of noise, but they also never seem to understand what Jesus is all about, they stab in the back, they reject, they fail to trust – it’s a long list of failures. For this reason, Bartimaeus, at least according to Mark, may just be the perfect disciple.

There is no long-winded pontificating from him on why Jesus is so great. He is healed, and simply follows on the way. This, in Mark’s gospel, is perfect obedience, perfect discipleship. Bartimaeus is made complete, he receives Shalom, and his story seems to end, because it has reached its perfection. So, he follows Jesus on the Way. Every step, every town, every encounter we might imagine Bartimaeus coming across new people, telling his story of healing and giving hope to the hopeless.

In a very real sense Bartimaeus finds healing and wholeness and begins a new path of becoming a part of other people's stories. In this way, Bartimaeus invites us, those who would try to follow this holy teacher, Jesus, to follow a new path.

Does your life make room for strangers to feel at home in your presence? Do you invite others in? Are you living today in ways that prepare you to meet your "best self?" How are you impacting or changing the lives of others?

We are stories. We are stories in search of completion, pining to be made whole. Bartimaeus invites us to live a new reality where it is not so much about our needs, but instead living for others. This brings up the question, "what story is your life writing?"