

Give voice to the voiceless – Marginalized

Soul Food Day 1

Scripture

Mark 10:46-52 (NIV)

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Throwing Off the Cloak

Every now and then a familiar story comes to new meaning. A recent re-reading of the story of Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52 pushes me into an area of discomfort that challenges my identity and my understanding of our identity as a faith community. It makes me question our responses to Jesus' unexpected ways of transforming people. It causes me to wonder how good my vision is after all.

To give a bit of context to the story, this takes place on the way to Jerusalem. Jesus' disciples have already had some adventures together and this story is the last story of healing before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. For the second time in his ministry, Jesus heals a blind man. The other incident is located in Mark 8:22. It seems there's something to pay attention to here about sight and blindness.

The disciples not catching on, though. They're busy thinking about what they will do after their dreams of triumph and success come true. Even after all the feeding, healing, and teaching, they've missed much of what Jesus' point has been. They still seem blind in a way.

Just before this story, the disciples were arguing over who will sit at Jesus' right hand. Jesus tells them “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” The point is definitely not about going for more power or status, but about letting go and aim down not up.

In v.46, they came to Jericho and met Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, who was sitting by the roadside. Jericho? Is there anything significant about this place? Amazing things have happened here in the past. Given the large crowd, something has been happening here now too. But Jericho was a dangerous place at the time. People who were fighting the Roman Empire were hiding out there. It was a place of turbulence, of disturbance.

Then the story says, "When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" I wonder about the language Bartimaeus uses. "Jesus the Nazarene" vs. "Jesus Son of David" Is there a reason he used the more political identifier rather than the typical indication of hometown? Is this a protest perhaps? A marker of more knowledge about this Jesus?

It's also interesting to note that it's the first time "Son of David" is used in Mark. The next reference is the triumphal entry. In any case, Bartimaeus seems to know about Jesus. He had heard the stories.

People ordered Bartimaeus to be quiet. One reading of this might be that he was simply annoying the group. Perhaps, though, this was more of a class disturbance. The hushers were just enforcing the normal social codes. A blind man shouting at a rabbi would be like a homeless person accosting a CEO for help.

But Bartimaeus keeps yelling. Normal social codes haven't worked in the past for him, so he decides to go all out. Ironic that these are the very social codes that Jesus had just been talking about subverting – being great by being a servant, the Son of Man coming to serve. The disciples and crowd had just heard the message, but slipped right back into the habitual ways of treating the outcast and marginalized.

Jesus' response, though was different. He doesn't respond as the CEO is expected to respond. Jesus hears Bartimaeus crying out and he responds to that cry. He stops what he is doing (stands still) and offers his time and attention to Bartimaeus.

In turn, Bartimaeus throws off his cloak and approaches the Teacher. The cloak here is used as a visual cue for blind person or beggar. It was often the only source of shelter, or lay it on the ground to collect alms. Interesting that the rich man in v.17-22 had trouble giving up his riches, but Bartimaeus immediately throws it all away.

Jesus stands still and listens to Bartimaeus, giving the opportunity for him to step outside the identity the Israelite culture had placed on him as marginalized. Bartimaeus responds by throwing away the symbol of his place as beggar and with energy comes to Jesus.

Bartimaeus is bold with responding to Jesus' question: 'What do you want me to do for you?' when he answers 'My teacher, let me see again.' It's the same questions as the disciples got in v.36, but a very different answer.

And Jesus' response to the request is different too. He says, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed him on the way. In Mark's Gospel, he is the only one of the people healed by Jesus who then followed him.

Bartimaeus has a clear identity in the Jericho community. He is a beggar; he can beg, but he is not to cry out and bother people, particularly rabbis leaving the city. Our identity is based on our social relationships. Bartimaeus' relationships are based on him being the one receiving assistance and speaking when spoken to, not speaking out. But Bartimaeus pushes the boundary of this identity by crying out to Jesus, and by declaring Jesus as "Son of David" - a strong statement linked to the Messianic vision.

We then see Jesus using his identity as rabbi with his position of culturally-granted power to call Bartimaeus forward. I wonder if Jesus might have also heard the "Son of David" phrase (the first time in the book of Mark) and been reminded of his identity beyond the socially-assigned ones. Did something stir in Jesus to act?

In any case, Bartimaeus pushes the boundaries of identity again and throws off his identifying beggar clothes to approach Jesus. Finally, we see Jesus using his position of God-granted power to give Bartimaeus a new identity of someone with the ability to see and Bartimaeus takes on the identity of a follower of Jesus.

By choosing to approach Jesus, and crying out for God's help, we start to let go of the identities given to us by the world. In the process, we are better able to see. And with our better vision, we see what Bartimaeus sees: the Messiah in the Nazarene, the one who can and does change our identities, our relationships to each other in society, who turns the social structure upside down in which the least are greatest and the greatest are the least -- God's plan for shalom in the world.

When we see what God's mission is in the world and the beauty of the transformation taking place in people's relationships and identities, we want to respond by becoming followers of Jesus and participate in this amazing work.

What would it look like for us as a faith community to cry out to God, step away from our assigned identities, and take the risk of following Jesus into a new identity? What kind of healing would we find if we would surrender what we hang on to from our past identities, like certain structures and images of church? Could we even shed the cloaks of our patterns of interaction, and embrace new ways of being a faithful community in our society? What would that mean for our relationships with recent immigrant communities? With our indigenous neighbours? With the stories we tell and conversations we have about the world around us?

This is a challenge. And I may not be up to the risk that it takes. But I believe that we are not alone in the journey. The fumbling, blind, inept disciples of Mark went through this and somehow were granted the grace to become the body of Christ.

This faith community continues the journey, constantly crying out for healing and being transformed by God's power. All we need to do is be willing to throw off our cloaks and step out in faith to follow Jesus' way.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now talk to Jesus.

Adapted from: <https://canadianmennonite.org/blogs/cheryl-woelk/throwing-cloak>

Soul Food Day 2

Scripture:

Luke 12:22-34 (NIV)

²² Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! ²⁵ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? ²⁶ Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

²⁷ “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ²⁸ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. ³⁰ For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. ³¹ But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³² “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Saying Yes to God's Exile and God's Earth

There is a man I know. More than a man – a friend and a prophet. He is Indigenous, tall, with small piercing eyes that bore into you with gentle kindness. He is a stranger longing for a heavenly country. His home on his back, he wanders deserts and back alleys. He lives in caves and parkades. Did I mention that he also has an amazing mullet?

From time to time, we meet. Always unplanned, never unexpected. With joy, we talk of the mysteries of the Bible and the battle we wage for Christ against evil.

On one occasion, I noticed my friend eyeing a bagged lunch he had just received from a street ministry. He said, “I am not trusting in God right now, Jeremiah”. I expressed my confusion—I know this man to be truly faithful.

“Well,” he said, “I am tempted to save this lunch for tomorrow. But I should be trusting God daily for my food”. Wordlessly he reached into his fanny pack (did I mention he has a purple fanny pack full of treasures?) and pulled out a small sandwich bag. In that bag was a New Testament. He opened the little Bible and I could not help but notice that nearly every verse was highlighted in a variety of colours.

Finally, he came to the verse that he was looking for: “And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his kingdom and these things will be given as well.” (Luke 12:30-31) In that moment God spoke to me.

I did not exactly know what God was saying to me through my friend until, with the help of others smarter than I, I came to understand Jeremiah 29: “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.” This letter goes on to say: marry, increase in number, and seek the prosperity of the city. This message would have been ridiculous to the Israelites. After all, they were exiles (estranged and homeless individuals) in the heart of the Babylonian empire!

In order to explain how ridiculous this would have been at the time of Jeremiah, a modern parallel might help. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a theologian and pastor in Germany during the reign of Nazism. Because of his faith, he became involved in the resistance to oust Hitler and was on the verge of being found out.

And even though he was near detection by the Gestapo and on the verge of death – he decided that he would get engaged to marry. He did this because he recognized God's great love for all creation. He saw it good then to "embrace this present life" by getting engaged and seeking marriage despite his circumstance. His decision was what he calls a resounding "Yes to God's earth" (quoted in *Bonhoeffer*, by Eric Metaxas, p. 456).

Getting married, even in the midst of great danger, was how Bonhoeffer followed the Lord's call to build homes and create a family in Babylon. In the same way, Jeremiah's plea to Israel encouraging them to say YES to God's earth is set alongside and is in the context of treacherous exile. The Lord beseeches his people to simultaneously say "Yes" to God's earth and "Yes" to God's exile.

To modern, Western ears the call to build houses and get married does not have the same heaviness. If I ever considered building a home, I will not likely consider Babylon or an oppressive regime – I would think about money and the market, but not exile.

I easily say "Yes" to God's earth, and don't always have much to say about that exile part. And then my friend read his New Testament from a sandwich bag. He spoke prophetically to my heart that day on the street. He was reminding me of my yes to God's exile. I was reminded that even though I feel so comfortable in my nice home and neighbourhood with my wonderful wife – I am really a stranger too.

Thanks to my friend's great faith, I am now able to say a louder 'yes' to God's exile. I am better able to trust in God, not in political or economic stability, for my security and future.

And through this friendship, I hope I am able to help my friend say a bit more boldly 'yes' to God's earth. I pray that "these things be given to him as well." (Luke 12:31)

The Church (a place where he feels very little welcome) is supposed to be the place where those who experience God's "Yes!" to earth and God's "Yes!" to exile commune together. This is how we maintain the delicate tension of two yeses: in community and through love. God, help us be true and united to your good earth and good exile.

Which 'yes' do you find it harder to embrace? Who can help you to embrace it?

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now talk to Jesus.

Adapted from:

<http://dojustice.crcna.org/article/saying-yes-god%E2%80%99s-earth-and-god%E2%80%99s-exile>

Soul Food Day 3

Scripture

Mark 10:46-52 (NIV)

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

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⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

The Living Word

The Bible is a book of knowledge but it is also a living word. This means that the Bible not only enriches our minds, but it also penetrates our hearts (see Hebrews 4:12). Sometimes when we focus so much on what the Bible says we sometimes miss what God is trying to say to us right now. That is why sometimes we just need to carve our space, often in silence, to mediate on scripture. That is what we will do today: mediate and rest in scripture. We will be there to guide you. Read the scripture slowly and then sit in still silence for one-minute resting in God. We will give you questions you can ask to God, however, allow the Holy Spirit to work on your heart what he wants in this time. Let's pray, *Father God guide us as we meet You in Your Word.*

Who do you most relate to in the story? Picture yourself there. What do you think God is trying to tell you?

Read Mark 10:46-52

Listen in silence for 1 minute

Read Mark 10:46-52

Do you know people who are in a similar situation to Bartimaeus? Pray for them and thank God for them

Listen in silence for 1 minute

Read Mark 10:46-52

Jesus may be asking you the same question he asked here, "What do you want me to do for you?".

Imagine Jesus asking you this. How do you answer that question?

Listen in silence for 1 minute

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now thank God for your time with him.

Soul Food Day 4

Scripture

Romans 12:9-21 (NIV)

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The Power of Friendship and Social Justice

June 22-23, 2020 a group of pastors, missionaries, staff, lay leaders and invited guests from the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Reformed Church in America met for a Journeys Into Friendship virtual consultation. During these two days together, we heard stories from those who have built intentional, authentic friendships with people in their communities. Friendships that bridge differences in race, religion and migration status. Friendships that have been a mutual blessing to both parties and a faithful response to following Christ... Yes, it was inspiring. Yes, it was challenging. Participating in this network also gives me an opportunity to continuously learn about the biblical concept of friendship, especially as it relates to global migration, and how true friendship compels us do the work of social justice.

Philos (phileo/philia) is one of the types of love we see repeatedly mentioned in the New Testament. Often interpreted as brotherly love, it also means a deep, abiding friendship. For many years I understood philos to define the type of love we, as Christ followers, are to have for those we consider to be siblings in the faith. It's what I was taught. As my studies of the scripture—and my faith—grew, particularly as I turned to the Bible to discern what it says about migration and how we should interact with those who migrate, I learned that the concept of hospitality centers around loving the stranger, the foreigner and the sojourner.

OK, there are two concepts. The first one, xenodocheo, means to entertain or host the foreigner (ex. [1 Timothy 5:10](#)). This is the type of relationship I see more often in response to caring for those who migrate (whether that migration is voluntary or forced), where there is a host who provides care and services to a foreign guest. The other, philoxenia, means to love (philos) the stranger (xenos) (ex. [Romans 12:13](#) and [Hebrews 13:2](#)). We also see this concept appear as a noun, philoxenon, in several New Testament passages (ex. [1 Timothy 3:2](#), [Titus 1:8](#) and [1 Peter 4:9](#)). Here we see the Bible describing hospitality as a deep friendship with the foreigner. Philoxenia changes the dynamics in the relationship from host and guest to mutual friends. Yes, one can practice xenodocheo hospitality and seek justice, as a host, for one's guest. However, for many of us, philoxenia (friendship love of the stranger) makes it much more difficult to stay silent and not seek justice for our friends.

Philoxenia doesn't allow us to treat our friends as projects or political statements that we agree or disagree with. It doesn't demand gratitude for services rendered. It invites us to acknowledge the power and privilege differences amongst friends, strive to understand their suffering and join with them in alleviating that suffering, including changing systemic beliefs, structures and practices that cause suffering.

Philoxenia means we don't turn a blind eye when our friend is:

- an international student whose visa has been revoked and is required to return home immediately;
- an immigrant working in a meat packing plant where hundreds of employees have become infected with COVID-19, but must show up for work every day or lose their job;
- an asylum-seeker whose child was removed from their care and placed in detention;
- a refugee who came to our country seeking freedom from persecution, only to lose their life due to racism or xenophobia;
- a DACA recipient who is sent to a country they don't remember, where they don't speak the language or have a support system after proving that they have been positively contributing to the country they call home;
- or a former refugee who has been waiting for years to be reunited with their spouse and children, but a travel ban has stopped that process indefinitely.

I have been blessed to hear story after story of people who were once diehard anti-immigration, who didn't believe in advocacy and social justice because they felt "too political" change their hearts, change their minds and become active justice seekers when these concepts went from being theoretical debate topics to practical steps required as acts of biblical love for a friend.

This is the power of friendship; this is the power of philoxenia.

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now talk to Jesus..

Adapted from: <http://dojustice.crcna.org/article/power-friendship-and-social-justice>

Soul Food Day 5

Scripture

2 Corinthians 5:15-20 (NIV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be

reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Hard Injustice to See

Recently, I was talking with theologian and scholar [Sylvia Keesmaat](#), who said this: “The biblical story unfolds through people at the margins. And we learn who God is largely through the stories of people at the margins. And what faithful life looks like, too.”

The problem I see happening today is too many white Christians like me think WE are the people on the margins, instead of the people at the centre of many forms of power. It’s easy to mask this power with the narrative that North American Christians are persecuted, or by envisioning ourselves as the last defenders of God’s own truth.

But what if we aren’t? What if we are ignoring the prophetic voices from the margins that are calling us to live in greater harmony with the earth and with our neighbours? What if those prophets and teachers are the people we least want to hear from, the ones we prefer to see as the recipients of our charity, the absolute last ones we would expect to be carriers of biblical truth?

What it comes down to is this: we like our justice far away, not nearby. It’s that group, over there, who are messing things up, not us. It’s those liberals whose government is laced with corruption, or those conservatives who can’t respect a woman in power. It’s definitely them; it’s not us.

But the problem with far-away justice is that it leaves us in power, with our hearts unexamined, our idols untouched. And it does nothing for the work of reconciliation.

We don’t like our justice nearby, when it creeps into places we have always held sway and demands that we listen to other voices, voices that want to say “no” to us and go against what we had planned. It’s hard to be pleased when justice holds up a mirror to our selfishness, our sexism, our racism, our desire to maintain our own positions of power and influence. When justice comes close, we realize that WE are the ones with the problem. Because the honest truth is we only want reconciliation if it doesn’t inconvenience us or demand something from us.

Through Christ’s work on the cross, God is reconciling all things (Col. 1:20). Whether or not we participate in it, the reconciling work of the Gospel continues; whether or not we listen to them, voices from the margins continue to speak.

Over and over Jesus warns his followers in the gospels: “You have ears but you cannot hear.” (See Mark 8:18 for one example.) Privilege and power for white Christians means we can choose NOT to listen to those whose words might cost us something.

And we think it won’t affect us much if we choose not to do these things. But it will. We won’t see the slow creep of selfishness and pride, we won’t recognize the ways our Christianity is weakened and our institutions are dying because we refuse to let in the Gospel story being upheld by those we are not listening to.

Through Christ, “you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). And that nearness demands that we let in the voices we don’t want to hear, that we also bring justice near and allow it to make plain the injustices of our own hearts.

Some questions to ask yourself as you consider this:

- Are you able to hear a “no” from someone you view as having less experience, less understanding of the way things work?
- Are you able to see the ways that you defend your own position of influence by discrediting the voices that point out sexism and bias in the way things are usually done?

- Are you able to see yourself not always as the defender of church doctrine and the dispenser of God's discipline, but also the recipient of it, even if it comes from the voices of people you consider worse sinners than yourself?

There may be no more urgent call to repentance than that you recognize this truth: ***the hardest injustice to see is the one you yourself are part of.***

In the cross we find both conviction and hope. We recognize our own sin and failings, but we also receive forgiveness and hope of new life. How can we begin to participate in the ongoing ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) entrusted to us? How can we begin to do this? Perhaps the most important starting point is to listen the way that Jesus listened, and to be willing to learn from people who we'd rather not hear, especially when they make us uncomfortable.

White Christians can educate themselves about the TRC Calls to Action in Canada and the history of race relations in North America. Men can ask themselves what they can do to support women in positions of leadership, and what they might be doing to subtly undermine those women. We can all ask more questions and listen humbly for the answers, even especially if they are uncomfortable for us. We can take ownership of reconciliation as being necessary work—our work, and our responsibility.

We can pray to overcome the resistance in our hearts so that we can truly hear prophetic challenges to our comfort and our power in the word “no.” And next time we hear it, we can simply respond: “Tell me more.”

Application

4. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
5. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted and challenged?
6. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?

Now talk to Jesus.

Adapted from: <http://dojustice.crcna.org/article/hardest-injustice-see>