

SERMON TITLE: "Take Courage"
SERMON TEXT: Mark 10:46-52
PREACHER: Rev. Kim James
OCCASION: November 14, 2021, at First UMC

INTRODUCTION

With Veteran's Day this past Thursday, the news media have been retelling some stories of courage both on the battlefield and back at home as Veterans struggle with ongoing physical and mental health challenges. Those stories reminded me of another person's courage.

In his book *Tough Times Don't Last, But Tough People Do*, Robert Schuler told of the story of Charlotte Valente. "By the age of 6, Charlotte had been in and out of the hospital 85 times. She [had] a rare disease in which her bones [would] break very easily. She had over 200 fractures by the time she was 10, but she was a delightful little girl, always smiling and very positive. Charlotte couldn't walk," explained Schuler, "because . . . her normal development had been permanently distorted. She [wasn't expected to ever] weigh more than 50 pounds in her entire lifetime. [But] she went to high school and graduated. Then she picked a university that had ramps equipped for the handicapped. She was accepted and graduated four years later Cum Laude. [And] Charlotte did not stop there," wrote Schuler. "She went on to law school and passed the state bar exam. All 50 pounds of her. That's courage!"¹

No matter who we are, courage is something we could all use more of. In Mark 10, I suppose that's why the people standing around Bartimaeus told him to "Take courage!" when Jesus said for him to come over. Different Bible translations put it a little differently. Our New Revised Standard Version pew Bibles say, "Take heart!" The New International Version translates the instruction as "Cheer up!" But the basic meaning of the original Greek word was "Be encouraged!" or "Take courage!"

This morning I'd like us to consider this gospel story of Jesus and Bartimaeus. Let's see how this story will help us to take courage.

1—JESUS HEARS US

According to this story in Mark 10, the first reason we can take courage is that Jesus hears us. As a blind beggar, Bartimaeus was used to being ignored. He was used to having people walk on the other side of the road to get away from him. He was used to having people turn their heads so they didn't have to look directly at him. He was used to people hurrying by as if they had no time in their busy day to stop and connect with a disabled man.

But then came Jesus. Bartimaeus knew that Jesus was someone special. Bartimaeus knew that, if he could get Jesus' attention, Jesus could offer him a unique kind of help. So Bartimaeus called out as loudly as he could, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" In spite of people trying to shush him up, Bartimaeus kept calling, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

We all know that Jesus could have chosen not to hear this plea. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the Passover and the final showdown with the Jewish authorities. Jesus had some life and death matters on his mind. No one would have faulted him if Jesus had simply ignored Bartimaeus' request. But Jesus stopped. He took the time to hear.

Some years ago, someone wrote a devotional based on the question, "What if God decided to install voicemail?" If you, like me, have recently had to make any kind of phone call where you had to punch a bunch of different numbers into an automated answering system, you might be able to relate to this.

The devotional said, "Imagine yourself praying to God, and then hearing this in return: 'Thank you for calling My Father's House. Please select one of the following options: Press 1 for requests, Press 2 for thanksgiving, Press 3 for complaints, Press 4 for all other inquiries.'

"What if God used the familiar excuse . . . 'I'm sorry, all of our angels are busy helping other sinners right now. However, your prayer is important to us and will be answered in the order it was received, so please stay on the line.'

“Can you imagine getting these kinds of response as you call [to] God in prayer?”

If you would like to speak to Gabriel, press 1. For Michael, press 2. For a directory of other angels, press 3. If you would like to hear King David sing a psalm while you are holding, press 4. To find out if a loved one has been assigned to heaven, press 5, enter his or her Social Security number, then press the pound key . . . For reservations at “My Father’s House,” please enter J-O-H-N followed by 3-1-6 . . . Our computers show that you have already prayed once today. Please hang up and try again tomorrow.

The devotional concluded by saying, “Thankfully, God doesn’t have voicemail, and God listens when we pray!”² Like Bartimaeus, we can take courage because we know that Jesus hears us.

2—JESUS AFFIRMS US

A second reason we can take courage is that Jesus affirms us. As the Son of God, Jesus has the power to heal our infirmities and make us whole. But he also has the power to affirm what is already strong in us. Notice what he said to Bartimaeus: “*Your faith* has made you well.” This story is different from some of Jesus’ other healings in which Jesus touched the sick person or smeared their eyes with mud. From what we read in Mark 10, we can’t tell that Jesus said or did anything special. All we read is that Jesus gave credit to what Bartimaeus already possessed.

This story makes me think of the Wizard of Oz. You remember, at the end, how the wizard declares that Dorothy had the ability to return home all along. All she had to do was tap her ruby red slippers together. Likewise, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Lion already had what they required. They just needed their brain, their heart, and their courage to be affirmed. Once they received that recognition, their problems were solved. They were made whole. Of course, life is never so simple as in the movies. But there’s truth in the idea that wholeness and healing come through receiving affirmation for what we already do and who we already are.

When I was pastor of the Wesley United Methodist Church in Pueblo, Colorado, we had a chapter of the National Federation of the Blind that met in our church building. One year, that group hosted their national convention and brought in an inspirational speaker named Erik Weihenmayer. Erik

had been blind since he was 13, but he didn't let that stop him from riding a bicycle across Vietnam and taking up rock climbing. As a matter of fact, at the time of his speech in Pueblo, Erik was planning to climb the 29,000 foot Mount Everest the next spring. He was going to be the first blind person to try that feat. His hope was that "his attempt to reach 'the top of the world' [would] help spark awareness of the abilities of blind people."³

Sometimes healing comes when our problems disappear. Sometimes healing comes when we learn to be whole people in spite of our handicaps and differing abilities. We really don't know what kind of sight Bartimaeus received. What we do know is that Jesus recognized and used the faith that Bartimaeus already had. Like Bartimaeus, we can take courage because Jesus affirms us as we are.

3—JESUS DIRECTS US

A third reason we can take courage is that Jesus gives us direction. Jesus doesn't just say, "You are well," and leave us there. If we're seeking some assistance, Jesus tells us what to do next. In the case of Bartimaeus, Jesus said, "Go. Don't just sit there by the side of the road begging. You need to get up and get busy living. Act on the faith and vision that you have." And that's what Bartimaeus did. He found a new purpose for his life. He joined in with Jesus' disciples and followed them toward Jerusalem.

The time comes when everyone must get up and get busy. I know it's hard to overcome inertia. It's especially difficult after nearly two years of COVID shut-downs. And none of us has grown any younger during these past two years. I'm not saying we should rush out and be foolhardy. Nor am I saying that we can all leap tall buildings, if we only put our minds to it.

But there are things that God would like us to do and that Jesus is calling us to do. As Thanksgiving is approaching, maybe Jesus would like you to invite someone to share your holiday feast. Or maybe you'd like to sign up for the mission fundraiser dinner on Thursday, Nov. 18, here at the church. I was so pleased last Sunday when I saw that one of our members had invited a friend to come to worship with her. That's certainly something we all can do. Even if you're worshipping from home on

Facebook, you can share our posts and invite others to worship along with you. Some of you are excellent at writing cards to those in need of encouragement. Some of you are really great at lifting others in prayer. Some of you have the ability to run errands or give rides. Some of you are handy and have the ability to fix things. And there's a sign-up chart in the narthex waiting for some of you volunteers with strong backs to take a turn shoveling snow.

Jesus is offering a number of opportunities to help raise us up and get us moving along the way of discipleship and faith. We can take courage from the direction that Jesus gives.

CONCLUSION

Whether it's our own health concerns or the troubles of the world, there will always be plenty of reasons to be pessimistic and afraid. It's very easy to sit alongside the road, feeling bad. But Jesus has something better in mind for us. So cheer up! Jesus has time to hear you. Take heart! Jesus recognizes and affirms what is already strong in you. Be encouraged! Jesus offers direction for your life. All who sit along the sidelines calling out for help, get up and take courage!

¹*Sourcebook of Wit and Wisdom* (Communications Resources: Canton, OH, 1996), p. 111.

²This came from a forwarded email with an unknown source.

³Gayle Perez, "Blind Golden man makes Mt. Everest his next goal," *Denver Post* (Oct. 27, 2000), p. 12B. Note that Weihenmayer actually did reach the summit of Mt. Everest on May 25, 2001.