

# The Park Road Pulpit

*Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church*

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

**Don't You Shush Me**

**Isaiah 61.1-2a and Luke 4.18 and Mark 10.46-52**

**April 26, 2009**

**Amy Jacks Dean**

**A Sermon Preached for the New Baptist Covenant at Wake Forest Divinity School**

**April 25, 2009**



Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell this same basic story of the healing of this blind beggar, but Mark is the only one to give the man a name – Blind Bartimaeus is how we know him. Jesus is headed to Jerusalem from Capernaum – and all along the way he is talking and teaching and answering questions and listening in on the disciples’ conversations with each other. You know how bad there were to get off track and try to figure out who was the favorite. (Thank goodness, in our superior humility, we’re not like them!) And apparently, by this point in Jesus’ ministry, he could draw a crowd. We arrive at our Blind Bartimaeus story just as Jesus is leaving Jericho headed for this final time to Jerusalem – his face was set. This road from Jericho to Jerusalem is wilderness country. I’ve seen the wilderness, and it’s not a place that I’d like make any kind of final pilgrimage journey. It’s not just hilly – it is mountainous. It is dry. It is barren. It is hot. It is in the middle of nowhere. There is no sign of life in the wilderness – no trees, no water, nobody. Except just on the outskirts of Jericho – just at the beginning of wilderness – Blind Bartimaeus is introduced to us.

He’s sitting beside the road. He may have been blind, but that meant that his hearing was extra keen. He could tell from the commotion of the crowds around him that something was going on. And then he must have heard someone simply say his name. “Oh, I believe that’s the guy – you know that guy from Nazareth – you know that guy that been making some headlines. Isn’t Jesus his name?” they must have said. And when Blind Bartimaeus heard the name Jesus he

set out to hollerin'. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" he yelled. Literally what he said was "Jesus, Mercy me." You see, mercy is not a feeling – as in "Oh, bless her heart." How many folks become invisible or trivialized with that deadly phrase – bless his heart. Mercy is not an emotion such as pity. Mercy is not a sentiment or an attitude. Lo and behold, mercy is an action. It's something that we do. It has to do with the last and the least. It has to do with the down and out. It has to do with the needy and the downtrodden. It has to do with the sick and the afflicted. Mercy has to do with how we treat those who are held captive – held captive by blindness or by poverty or by oppression. Some folks are held captive by their jobs – tied to a desk or their blackberries or the precious World Wide Web. And some folks are held captive by the allure of power. And some are held captive to substances that alter their lives and other by mental illness and others by grief. Folks all around us are crying out – "Jesus, mercy me." "Church, mercy me."

And guess what? We are the crowd just on the outskirts of Jericho – just on the edge of wilderness ourselves – that respond to Blind Bartimaeus. "Shush!" Not just the polite, southern, genteel, "Shhh." They shushed him. Thank God, Blind Bartimaeus didn't pay them no mind. He hollered out even louder this time. "Jesus, Mercy me." Blind Bartimaeus must have yelled loudly enough that second time that Jesus stopped in his tracks and said to the shushing crowd, "Call him over here." And here's the best part of the story. The crowd that had shushed Blind Bartimaeus, the crowd that had silenced the one in need, the very crowd that was willing to ignore and disregard this child of God living in captivity – this crowd started helping Blind Bartimaeus to his feet and gathering his coat and scurrying him along saying, "Come on, Jesus is ready to see you now."

We should be ashamed - for we are that crowd on the outskirts of Jericho living just on the edge of wilderness ourselves – more willing to shush those who live in captivity than to

release them. We all do it. Cooperative Baptists and Progressive National Baptists and Alliance of Baptists and General Conference Baptists and American Baptists and Southern Baptists and Lott Carey Baptists and General Association Baptists and just regular old run-of-the-mill Baptists, all of us, spend more time shushing the captives than releasing them.

Let's take a turn to Luke and our theme verses for the weekend. When we arrive at our theme text for the weekend, Jesus has just returned from his wilderness experience to Galilee – the lakefront property of the region. If it had been me, this is the part of Holy Land country where I would have set up camp and stayed put. You wouldn't have caught me in that dry and barren land of wilderness. No, I would have stayed where it was lush and green with banana trees and olive trees and the most beautiful water – sometimes blue and sometimes green depending on how the sun and the clouds work together. It must have truly been a sight for Jesus' sore eyes! And where does he go first? To the synagogue, to teach, of course. And news began to spread about him throughout the whole area. News? or Gossip? or Rumors? Who knows. All we know is that this was one prophet – one of many – but this one was really beginning to make a name for himself. I would even venture to say that folks may have been calling him the real deal – unlike so many others who passed through but were far from real. So he decides to go back home – sometimes a difficult proposition – but he goes to Nazareth nonetheless. He simply can't help himself – he heads straight for the synagogue. Of all the passages for him to read, he chose words from the prophet Isaiah. You'd think after some wilderness time, he would have come up with something new and innovative and creative? Something that would have astounded them beyond belief? Something they'd never heard before? Something in 4-color glossy print? Something that would have them spellbound – wondering to themselves “why haven't we heard about this before?” But no. He opened up the

scroll and taught them an old, old lesson – something that he, and any good Jew would have surely known by heart. Nothing new. Nothing profoundly innovative. Nothing with a new zing and zap and wow. Nothing that even a Powerpoint *presentation* could spice up. He simply quoted the prophet Isaiah to them. He taught them something they already knew. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind.* And with that, he rolled that scroll right back up and sat down. He goes home and teaches them . . . nothing new. He was run out of town for it, but he said what he had to say.

And here we sit in a gathering of all kinds of Baptists. From all walks of life with all colors of skin to hear the same old Good News. *The Spirit of the Lord* was upon Isaiah, and *the Spirit of the Lord* was upon Jesus, and I believe *the Spirit of the Lord is upon us*. If this is indeed God's year to act and if we are to respond to a society in crisis, we've got to turn our shushing and our silencing into a release and recovery mission. Too many people in our towns and in our churches live just on the outskirts of Jericho and just on the edges of wilderness. They cry out to God and they look to us to find a Way. And because we are too busy or too tired or too overwhelmed or too underfunded, we shush them and in so doing they remain in captivity. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon us*, brothers and sisters, to release the captives – to set them free! How can we not see that Jesus has already recognized them and called them over here? If you'll remember, that's our signal, shushing crowd. Once Jesus has heard his name called, he stops in his tracks and calls all of those who live in captivity to "come here." That's when the crowd jumps into action. That's when the crowd helps someone up, grabs their coat, pays their rent, puts a roof over their heads, educates all the children, visits those in prison and scurries them along to meet the One who promises a fullness of life. We are the Body of Christ and today all

the Blind Bartimaeus's of the world, all of those who live in captivity, holler out to us, "Church, Mercy me." "Children of God who call ourselves Baptist, mercy me."

Jesus didn't assume anything with Blind Bartimaeus. He took the time to look the begging man in the eye and asked one simple question – *what do you want me to do for you?* And Blind Bartimaeus answered for all of us when he said – *let me see* – so simple – *let me see*. Sometimes we are the shushing crowd and sometimes we are the blind beggar, but guess what? Many in that shushing crowd, along with the once-was-blind-but-now-I-see Bartimaeus, all set out – together - from Jericho to Jerusalem that day. And they made their wilderness pilgrimage bound together with Jesus. That day it was a freedom march – for the captives had been released. May it be so for us as well.