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Discipleship and Christian Life

The Encounter of Bartimaeus

Reflecting upon Mark 10:46-52 the story of Bartimaeus.

The story of the calling and healing of Bartimaeus is one that we can look to for some principles of discipleship. These principles in the story give us insight on how to serve others in our apostolic work. While Jesus is walking to Jerusalem, just outside of Jericho, a blind beggar hears of his passing through and calls to Him, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” Many told him to be silent, but he continued. Jesus noticed and told his disciples to call Bartimaeus over to Him. Bartimaeus heard the call of the disciples and got up, throwing off his cloak, immediately going to Jesus. Then Jesus asked him a question. “What do you want me to do for you?” His reply was “Master, I want to see” and Jesus’ reply was “Go your way, your faith has saved you.” Once healed, Bartimaeus followed Jesus. (Mk 10:46-52 retold)

There are many points in this story we can focus on in terms of accompanying people through the stages and thresholds of discipleship. I will highlight two principles of discipleship covered in the EQUIP model that has been provided for us. The EQUIP model is Encounter, Question, Invitation, and Promise. The two principles I will cover from this story are Encounter and Question. The encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus starts with a call. Though blind, Bartimaeus saw that Jesus was the son of David and called out to Him for mercy. Recognizing the faith of the blind man, Jesus has his disciples go and call him. Bartimaeus received the call and immediately casts his cloak aside.(Mk 10:46-49) His cloak was probably his only possession. This action symbolizes casting off the past life and attachment to sin. The beginning of this encounter is important to stop and contemplate on in terms of steps in discipleship, in

moments where people have encountered Christ through you as a disciple, have heard the call, and are preparing their hearts to encounter Christ Himself.

The second principle in this story is the Question. Once Bartimaeus reaches Jesus, he is asked a question. Questions in scripture are not asked by God because he does not know, they are asked to bring forth a truth about the speaker. The question Jesus asks is “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mt 10:51), seeking to bring forth the yearnings of Bartimaeus’ heart. The answer could have been different. He could have asked for security or stability in livelihood. He could have even asked to be less persecuted by others. Bartimaeus’ answer was simple, “Master, I want to see.” (Mt 10:51) He asked to be restored to the wholeness that he was created for. The confidence of faith in this statement is so great that Jesus doesn’t even have to touch him for healing. With his sight restored physically and the spiritual reality that he could already sense confirmed, Bartimaeus followed after Jesus. Bartimaeus has an encounter with Christ, with an honest heart, that answered humbly to his seeking questions, that led him to know which way to go, to follow.

To apply these principles to apostolic work, especially direct discipleship, we need to view them from different perspectives in the story. In the Encounter perspective, we are to be aware of the calling out of those suffering in our lives. In our culture it most likely will not be as clear as the calling out to Jesus as Bartimaeus’ was. We, in ministry, are called to be aware of the workings of the spirit and to meet people in their sufferings to call them to Christ. Jesus sends those who are in discipleship to bring the suffering to Him. He uses this moment in the story to teach His own disciples what they are to do. It is also important to note that there will be discouragement from surrounding influences, and we as disciples are called to be the encouragement in the follow through of the call towards Jesus.

The second principle and perspective in the story to apply to our apostolic mission is Question. In ministry to those outside, and sometimes inside the Church, we know they need Jesus. We know the answer to life's problems is always and eternally Jesus. Jesus knew this, and still asked the question. Even though we know this, and it is true, it is not our job to diagnose people and tell them what they need. It has to be self diagnosis, the type that comes from the deepest, and usually the simplest of questions. What is it that you want God to do in your life? What is it that you are longing for? Bartimaeus was sitting in his brokenness for so long that he knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted to be whole, to be in communion with his people. In ministry, it will not always be this clear. There will be much confusion and bitterness to tend to in terms of suffering and the needs of others. It is our job to call them, and prepare them for their encounter with Christ. Christ will do the work of healing once faith is shown.

In the story of Bartimaeus' encounter with Christ we see two principles for discipleship, Encounter and Question. It is important for us to contemplate the details of this story so that we can see what God is calling us to do in these situations in our own apostolates and ministries. In the story Christ hears the calls of the blind man and responds to his faith by calling him to be healed. Our own part in this story is of the disciples, and sometimes of Bartimaeus himself. We are to call others to Christ and encourage that journey of encounter, and we are to also answer the question, "What is it that we want?" Equipped with sight and healing then we too can follow Christ to the next points of growth in discipleship.