

# *Did You Hear What Happened on the Jericho Road?*

Mark 10: 46-52

Sermon Notes from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois  
23rd Sunday after Pentecost, October 28th, 2018  
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Diana Butler Bass wrote a book about Gratitude<sup>1</sup>. In this book she makes a case that people who are grateful—people who count their blessings and who give thanks—lead less anxious lives. She sites scientific studies:

She quotes Dan Baker: “During active appreciation the threatening messages from your amygdala and the anxious instincts of your brainstem are cut off . . .”<sup>2</sup> The tide of anxiety is stemmed by gratitude.

She quotes Robert Emmons (at UC Davis) who says that gratitude blocks the toxic emotions of envy, resentment, regret, and depression. Grateful people are more stress-resilient. Giving thanks strengthens social ties and feelings of self-worth.

She quotes a lot of people. The upshot: to live a grateful life is to live a better life.

At a recent lecture, Diana Butler Bass said after writing her book on Gratitude she felt like an expert. But this summer she forgot what she learned. She told this story.

This summer on a much-needed vacation in Wyoming, she and her husband went for a horseback ride. Her husband, a good rider, fell off the horse. He was badly injured. With much effort, Dianna got him to tiny community hospital where he began recovering from six broken ribs and punctured a lung.

After a day or so, she began to get mad. Her vacation was in a shambles; it was going to be spent going back and forth from a Holiday Inn to a small hospital in rural Wyoming. She was mad that her plans weren't going as planned.

Her grown daughter said, “Mom, you should be grateful. Dad only broke six ribs. His punctured lung is healing without surgery. He could have broken his neck; he could be paralyzed; he could be dead.”

Then she said to her mom, “You should read your book.”

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Gratitude is good for you. Thanking God makes life better. Gratitude is the attitude.

Nobody knew this better than blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timmaeus. When Jesus calls him over, Bartimaeus is sitting on the side of the road. When Jesus calls him, he doesn't “get up.” He doesn't “rise.” He doesn't “stand.” He “sprang up.” The Greek word *anapēdaō* means to “leap” or to “spring.” He was grateful to have been called, he leapt up and came to Jesus. And after Jesus healed him, his response was to follow. I presume—though scriptures doesn't say so—that his response was borne out of *gratitude*.

It's been said that after the decision to believe in Jesus, the most important decision we make after that is how we are going to spend out lives as disciples of Jesus following him. That's a question of stewardship.

We in the church have made the idea of stewardship small and painful. We make stewardship small by relegating it to a “season” that lasts a few weeks in the fall. We make stewardship painful by relegating it to “fund raising” to “make a budget.” This is a mistake.

Stewardship, rather, is a year-round challenge. How am I going to be a disciple today? Am I going to be true to Christ's call? That's an every day kind of question. Stewardship is a season that lasts year round.

Further, Stewardship isn't about our money and it's certainly not about a budget. Well, *it is* about our money, and a church budget *is* part of the equation. But the question posed by stewardship is not how am I going to spend my money, but how am I going to spend my whole life? How am I going to spend my days and nights? How am I going to harness my imagination? How am I going to get the most out of my education? How am I going to become a Christian philanthropist? How am I going to use my money, my time, my talent? *How am I going to show and live my gratitude to God?*

Bartimaeus sprang up when Jesus called him. And because he was grateful, he made the second most important decision of the Christian life: he became a follower.

I'm curious about Bartimaeus. I wonder how he spent the rest of his life? Did he always have that spring in his step? How did he walk, serve, and love on the down days, during the long midnights of the soul? Were there days, sighted as he was, that he struggled to get out of bed? Did he follow for long? Forever? We don't know. But I wonder.

Did Bartimaeus serve dinner every weeknight at the shelter? Did he visit every Tuesday at the memory care unit at the nursing home? Did he change his spending habits? Did he start to recycle his plastic and old newspapers? Did he make more time to laugh? Did he take more seriously the holiness of tears? Did he begin to pray every time he heard a siren racing across town? Did he march to put an end to gun violence?

How did he share his time with others? Did he tutor in the DREAM House after school program every Thursday? Did he visit elderly people in the neighborhood who felt like they had been forgotten all alone in the big, empty houses? Did he mentor college kids in the local campus ministry? Did he buy snow cones for the entire elementary school on the day before summer vacation? Did he read books on theology? Did he listen more than he talked? Did he become a friend of silence? Did he take up square dancing? Could he pinch a penny? Could he put on an extravagant spread? Did he count to ten when he got angry? How did he order his days and his nights? How did he direct his prayers, spend his money, set his priorities? Did he sing this song in the Sunday choir?

*God of the rainbow  
God of the cross  
God of the empty grave  
How does the creature say Grace?  
How does the creature say Thanks?*

I wonder about Bartimaeus. I wonder about me and you. We've been given a life to live to God's glory. We've been blessed in ways too numerous to count. How will we share that which has been entrusted to our care? I don't get to answer that question for you; I only get to ask it.

May God guide our steps . . .

**Mark 10: 46-52** They came to **Jericho**. As he and his **disciples** and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, **Bartimaeus** son of Timaeus, a **blind beggar**, was sitting by the roadside. **47** When he heard that it was **Jesus of Nazareth**, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, **Son of David**, have mercy on me!” **48** Many sternly ordered him to **be quiet**, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” **49** **Jesus stood still** and said, “**Call** him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” **50** So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. **51** Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “**My teacher**, let me see again.” **52** Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on **the way**.

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<sup>1</sup> **Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks**, Diana Butler Bass, HarperOne, 2018. The author of the multiple award-winning *Grounded* and leading trend spotter in contemporary Christianity explores why gratitude is missing as a modern spiritual practice, offers practical suggestions for reclaiming it, and illuminates how the shared practice of gratitude can lead to greater connection with God, our world, and our own souls.

<sup>2</sup> *What Happy People Know* (2003) Ban Baker.