

Bart

Mark 10:46-52

October 25, 2009

Do you like your name?

My mother is named Faith Naomi. She decided to go by Kathi! My mother-in-law's name is Imogene Alberta. She goes by Gene.

But I think my father takes the cake. He's "the man without a middle name." He was named George Ensworth, Jr., no middle name. At least that's what the doctor wrote on his birth certificate. He was supposed to be George Junior Ensworth. His family wanted to call him "Junior" and they did. When my father was a grown man with grown children, his older sister was still calling him "Junior!"

We don't get to choose our names. We may choose what we want to be called, but our given names are just that -- given. Our names remain with us, a part of our identity we cannot leave behind or change, an essential part of who we are that we carry with us, wherever we are, whatever we do, like it or not!

So, do you like your name?

The story in today's gospel lesson features a man named Bart. Do you suppose he liked his name?

It's not a common name. I haven't known many Barts. I had a friend in high school named Bart, Bart Nourse. Then there's Bart Starr, the Green Bay Packers quarterback. And Bart Simpson. I don't know very much about him, because I don't watch the show. Maybe the "person" who best embodies the name is not a person at all, but a train! I'm referring to BART, the acronym for the Bay Area Rapid Transit!

"Bart." The name sounds gruff, harsh, abrupt. It's hard and unpretty and in-your-face. And it fits.

The name fits him. He was hard and unpretty and in-your-face. That's who he was: "Bart." Not Peter or John or James: strong names, respectable names. Not Philip or Nathaniel or Luke: elegant names, aristocratic names. Not even Zacchaeus: surely an exotic and extravagant name, especially for a little man!

He was Bart, just Bart. Hard and unpretty and in-your-face. The one who gets in the way. The one who gets under foot. The one who gets under your skin. The one you want to ignore, but can't. The loud one. The obnoxious one. The squeaky wheel.

The outsider. The outcast. The unfortunate. The beggar at the side of the road. The panhandler accosting you on the sidewalk. The misfit you try to steer away from. That's Bart ...

*He had no dignity or beauty
to make us take notice of him.
There was nothing attractive about him,
nothing that would draw us to him.
We despised him and rejected him;
he endured suffering and pain.
No one would even look at him --
we ignored him as if he were nothing.*

That's Bart -- Bartimaeus. Do you know what his name means? Do you know what "Bartimaeus" means? His name is bar-timaeus, "son of Timaeus." He didn't even have his own name!

What were his parents thinking? They looked at their child, their new baby boy ... and named him "son"? What kind of name is that? A generic name. An impersonal name. A throwaway name.

Nobody cares about Bartimaeus. Nobody wants to see him. Nobody wants to hear him. Nobody cares what he wants or what he needs.

Except Jesus. Except Jesus. Jesus is the exception.

Nobody loves me ... *Except Jesus!*

Nobody appreciates me ... *Except Jesus!*

Nobody listens to me ... *Except Jesus!*

Nobody wants me ... *Except Jesus!*

He cried out, and Jesus heard him. Jesus heard him and called him and welcomed him and gave him his attention ... and healed him. "What do you want me to do for you?," Jesus asked. And when he answered, Jesus gave him what he wanted. That simple? That simple!

I wonder why the ending to this story is so different from the ending of the story of the rich man who came to Jesus. He too told Jesus what he wanted, but he went away disappointed. Why didn't Jesus give him what he wanted?

But he did! The rich man wanted the way to eternal life, and Jesus gave it to him! He got what he wanted. He knew what to do. He just couldn't do it. When they asked, Jesus gave them both what they wanted. When they asked, Jesus gave them both what they needed.

Bartimaeus wanted to see, and he did. Bartimaeus needed ... well, what did he need? He needed love, dignity, respect, affirmation, welcome, honor. And Jesus gave it to him. Jesus gave him honor.

That's his name, you know. Bartimaeus. Bar-timaeus. Son of Timaeus. Son of τιμη. Son of honor! The honorable one!

It fits. His name fits!

That's Bart's story, but what about you? What does this have to do with your story? I want to suggest two ways Bart's story can impact your story. I want you to take Bart's story to heart in two ways.

First ... If you ask, Jesus will give you what you want. If you ask, Jesus will give you what you need. Do I really believe that? Yes, I do.

I believe that Jesus will give you what you want and need ... within his power to give it. Because some things Jesus does not have the power to give. When James and John came asking for places of honor next to him in the Kingdom of heaven, Jesus told them that was not in his power to give. And, yet, Jesus did give them what they wanted. He showed them the true path to honor, the path of servanthood.

Jesus is not a magician. He is a savior. He is not a genie, granting whatever wish or whim we may have. He is the Son of God, bringing the power of God's grace to bear in our lives so we may fully be ... what God has made us to be.

Helen or Craig. Erin or Cole. Dom or Jessica. Michelle or Bart. God knows your name and God knows you, and if you ask, when you ask, God will give you what you need to fulfill your destiny.

Which leads me to the second thing I want you to take to heart ... Once Bartimaeus was healed, what did he do? He followed Jesus, on the road. On the road to where? On the road to Jerusalem! On the road to the place where Jesus will fulfill his destiny, where he will be rejected and betrayed, where he

will suffer and die, where he will offer himself as a sacrifice for many, where he will give himself for the salvation of the world.

What is Bartimaeus' destiny? To go with Jesus!

What is your destiny? To go with Jesus!

Jesus told Bartimaeus, "Your faith has made you well." His faith made him well, because it brought him sight and honor, but also because it set him on a new path, also because it changed the trajectory of his life. Bartimaeus' faith -- in Jesus -- made him well, not by giving him back the life he once had, but giving him a life -- a meaningful, purposeful, genuinely grounded life -- for the first time. And that life was on the road with Jesus.

Jesus doesn't give us what we want so we may continue along our way. He gives us what we need so we may follow in his way.

He doesn't show us a path to the fulfillment of our dreams. He is the path to the fulfillment of our destiny.

Faith is not a means to the end we already have in mind. Faith makes us the means to the end God has in mind!

So, by all means, ask Jesus for what you want. Ask Jesus to give you what you need. But when you do, you better be ready, because when he answers, you'll be going places, tagging along with Jesus, off to wherever Jesus takes you!