

Madeline L'Engle wrote a book entitled the Glorious Impossible. It's topic is largely a meditative work on the Incarnation filled with artwork. The title has always stuck with me; I love it. We could use that same phrase to title today's gospel passage. The contrasts between this blind beggar and the previous folks Jesus has been dealing with couldn't be greater. Compared with the rich man, Bartimaeus is dirt poor, sitting "along the way" or more vividly, "in the gutter." While the rich man couldn't give up his wealth to follow Jesus, Bartimaeus throws off his cloak (perhaps his only possession?) in order to join Jesus on the way.

Now understand the value of his cloak. The garment I am presently wearing is called a chasuble which literally means "little house". We might be more familiar with the term poncho. This cloak was once the everyday wear of most people protecting them from the elements and easily doubles as a mat to sleep on. It is a large conical bit of material and with a hole in the center for one's head; it is light and readily adaptable to many situations...and of course was unadorned, unlike the chasuble we know from the liturgy. I digress.

Now we also have the disciples in this story of the glorious impossible. Jesus asks both the disciples and Bartimaeus what they want from him. And while the disciples ask for status and power, Bartimaeus only wants his basic needs met: "let me see again." As a result, Bartimaeus immediately moves from sitting "*by the way*" to following Jesus "*on the way*." He has gone from beggar to disciple.

What Jesus says to him is important. We translate it "Your faith has made you *well*," but the Greek word for "well" is also "whole" or, "saved." We might read it as "Your faith has *saved* you." Earlier in the chapter the rich man asked how he could inherit eternal life. When Jesus told him to admit his dependence on God (by giving up wealth) and solidarity with others (by giving his wealth to the poor), he couldn't do it. When the disciples saw what they believed to be an extreme requirement, they also despaired ("then who can be saved?"). Jesus answered them, "*With humans it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*"

Now Jesus shows him the truth of his words. In every way imaginable it should be impossible that Bartimaeus can be saved. Blindness and poverty are taken as signs, in the first century, of punishment for sin. That's why those around him try to hush him up – it's embarrassing to have a sinner call out to a revered teacher. Yet Bartimaeus calls and Jesus answers. Simply by recognizing his most basic need, trusting that Jesus can provide, and being willing to give up what he has in order to follow, Bartimaeus has been saved, restored, invited into the kingdom. A miracle of the glorious impossible.

His response? Follow Jesus. And ours?...

O God, let us perceive the impossible possibility that you love us, have saved and restored us, and now invite us to be a follower, and perceiving all this, let us join you on the way. Amen.

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