

**TEXT: Mark 10:46-52**

**TOPIC: Blind Bartimaeus cries out as Jesus passes Jerico because Bartimaeus wants to have his sight restored.**

**SUBJECT: It will be through hardship that people regain the vision of what Christ is calling and sending them to do.**

**TITLE: Ad Astra Per Aspera**

My all-time favorite TV show is M\*A\*S\*H. When I watch reruns, it's strange how every episode is my favorite of that series.

One episode stands out for our message today. It's the episode where a Korean-American baby is left by its mother outside the Swamp, the tent where Drs. Pierce, Honeycutt, and Winchester slept. The American-Korean child was abandoned by its mother because if it had stayed in her care, it would have likely been killed. As the episode unfolds, the medical staff has no choice but to leave it at a monastery, where monks would end up raising her.

A similar experience touched my life this last week. A week ago, Jodi Baker shared pictures of a puppy found at the dog park. I immediately fell in love with the puppy, they'd named Stella. I met her a little over a week ago, and like most puppies, she gave me lots of kisses. I told Jodi that I would leave her there through the weekend, so I could have time to get what I felt I needed to take care of her. So, I got a kennel, dog food and a dish, for starters.

When I was on my way to Salina to get those things, I started thinking of names. The first one was Banjo, but Banjo seems more appropriate for a boy. So, I thought about what would meaningfully connect me with her. That's when her name hit me. I'd name her Astra for the Kansas motto: Ad astra per aspera – to the stars through hardship.

Like little, baby Astra, Bartimaeus knew rejection. Bartimaeus had become blind, so he used a beggar's coat so people could throw him pocket change, so he could survive. Bartimaeus was also the son of Timaeus and that designation is important. Being the son of Timaeus meant

Bartimaeus was the son of nothing. Bartimaeus was a reject. He was someone society disposed of like a used McDonald's wrapper.

I couldn't help but wonder if little Astra hadn't also been treated like she was disposable. Her short life certainly indicated the possibility that despite being only weeks old, she'd experienced hardship. That was one of the reasons I so badly hoped to adopt her, and I can't help but wonder what would happen if our world embraced the idea that no one and nothing is disposable. I couldn't help but wonder what would happen if people saw the worth in every living creature.

One of the most profound experiences of my life was when I visited a school that was used to retrain former child soldiers and female victims of a 12-year-long civil war in Liberia, Africa. At that school, students learned computer skills, hairdressing, baking, and sewing among other things. While there, I'll never forget seeing Dr. Martin standing at what appeared to be a cliff, so I walked over and stood next to him. What I saw below was something I'd only ever seen on TV commercials for relief agencies.

Below were homes built leaning against homes, with raw sewage flowing out of the area through a series of ditches. The roofs covering people's living space were composed of rusty corrugated sheet metal. Living there were the Bartimaeus' and the Astra's of the world. Not Liberia; the world. That's when I heard Dr. Martin utter, "For now, we see in a mirror darkly, but then we will see face to face. For now, we know in part, but then we will know fully even as we have been fully known," from 1 Corinthians 13:12.

For all practical purposes, what I saw that day was an outcry of everything the world chooses not to see. That day my eyes were opened and it was impossible to unsee it.

What I saw that day was a world that often walks right past the Bartimaeus' of our day, whether they are poor, living with mental illnesses, or whether they live struggling with addictions. What I saw that day was a community crying for mercy. Lord Jesus, have mercy was Bartimaeus' plea. I can't help if having mercy wasn't Astra's dying plea.

I have lived a privileged life. I have not seen things I needed to see face to face. I have known things in part even though I wouldn't tap into the One who fully knows me. It is hard for me when I work through hardship to reach for the stars when the hardship is more familiar. Maybe the same is true for some of you, I don't have the luxury of knowing what is hard for you.

Yet that's what Bartimaeus was doing, and it's what little Astra did. Sometimes, the imperative for us is to look in the mirror and not forget what we see. Sometimes, the hardship has everything to do with knowing there are times to know as fully because as people come to know as fully as they can, that knowledge can drive the hope to reach for the stars through hardship.

What's necessary is having our vision restored like Bartimaeus', and that can be especially challenging because when vision is restored, it can be hard to not to join the others who try to shush Bartimaeus, so he isn't crying out to Jesus. Having our vision restored like Bartimaeus' means seeing as Christ would have us see. Having our vision restored like Bartimaeus' doesn't just mean seeing those we already care for; having our vision restored means seeing ourselves and caring for everything that is good, bad, and ugly. Seeing ourselves means intentionally seeing what we don't want to see, and seeing what we don't want to see takes an act of mercy.

Maybe the best we can do is to become more like Bartimaeus and less like Jesus' disciples up to this point in Mark's gospel. Maybe our task is to join the chorus of cries, so our plea for healing and saving will help us be whole, so we are more whole for others.

Maybe it's time to reach for the stars through hardship and experience a small *ad astra per aspera* by throwing off our cloaks to make our way through the crowd for the new life that Jesus has waiting for us.

Maybe our *ad astra per aspera* is about living into a preferred future where no one lives in poverty or abandonment because we – as a family – provide a more sustainable family.

Maybe what matters is when people realize Jesus stands asking us, "what do you want me to do for you?" It's the same question he asked James and John last week. When people approach the question differently, humility makes it so we see ourselves, others, our world more clearly, so that no one ends up like Bartimaeus, who was the son of nothing or like my little Astra, who ultimately crossed the rainbow bridge in Jodi's arms.

Maybe Bartimaeus' cry and Astra's cry should be our cry to Jesus for mercy rather than to be stuck in a society overly focused on rivalries, consumerism, anxiety, entertainment and self-gratification. After all, when all the Bartimaeus' and all the Astra's of our world cry out, Jesus' response is a response for us to see a world we need because, we too, are reaching for stars through hardship. Jesus' question invites us to attach to the vision God has in store for us and all of creation. The only question that remains is: how willing we are to actually pursue it?

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.