

Rise Up
Rev. Cindy Maddox
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Mark 10:46-52

When I was a child, I was afraid of dogs.
Not just a dog nipping at my heels
but the dog yipping in the fields down the street,
was enough to send me running inside,
running to hide from what I couldn't even see.
Then my dad bought a dog—a hunting dog, he thought.
He thought wrong.
So fierce, a rabbit came to her fence and she played with it.
She played with me or at least she tried.
I tried to be unafraid.
So I'd call her to me
 and when she came bounding, beagle ears flopping—
 my courage dropping,
 my fears stopping me from what I really wanted—
I raced inside, slammed the door, then looked through the glass,
 knowing I was safe
 from puppy kisses and unconditional love.
Joy said "Come here!"
Fear said, "Go away!"
Competing voices from the same heart.

Bartimaeus used his voice to speak his heart's desire.
Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!
The crowd hushed him, shushed him,
 embarrassed by his loud demands.
But his desire was too big for decorum,
 his need too great for gentility,
so he shouted his heart to the heavens.
 Have mercy on me.
They rushed to hush him for he didn't know his place,
 his space on the side of the road
 assigned to allow him to beg appropriately,

head bowed, heart cowed.

This shouting was not allowed for it outed them,
 his presence an indictment for their lack of care.
 The crowd always silences uncomfortable truth.

But truth will out.

Jesus heard the shouts, stood still and said,
Call him here.

The one you denied.

The one you tried to hide.

The one you silenced, to hide your own sin—call him here.

Call her here.

The one whose body you tried to control.

The one whose body you made your goal
 to possess, as if yours to take—call her here.

Call them here.

The one whose pronouns you deny,

whose gender you must classify,

whose experience you don't understand—call them here.

Call the others here.

The ones who've been hurt by the church,

the ones who gave up the search

for faith that was relevant and unshaming—call them here.

Call yourself here.

Though you thought you'd given up church for lent,

call the part of you that still laments

the loss of community you experienced there—call yourself here.

Fear says "Go away."

Joy says "Come here."

Jesus said, "Call him here," so they turned to him and said:

Take heart. Take courage. And rise up.

We know all about rise up.

We learned from Lin-Manuel:

When you're living on your knees, you rise up.

We learned from Maya Angelou:

You may shoot me with your words,

*You may cut me with your eyes,
 You may kill me with your hatefulness,
 But still, like air, I'll rise.*

What will it take for us to rise
 from the pool of shame that others made us lie in
 from the grave of despair that our hearts tried to die in
 from the depths of apathy that we let ourselves hide in.
 What will it take for us to rise?

Glennon Doyle says we can do hard things—
 I can do hard things but more often do easy things the hard way,
 maybe the heart way,
 Bartimaeus's heart knew the way to do three hard things—
 he threw off his cloak, sprang up, and went to Jesus.
 A beggar's cloak was coat and tent,
 blanket and roof,
 cash box and beggar's cup,
 sometimes the only thing between him and the cold world.
 How could he leave behind what he couldn't find again
 with no eyes to see
 if his faith was misplaced.
 The crowd that silenced him could not be trusted
 to return or provide
 that which he needed to survive.
 But still he left it behind
 somehow believing he wouldn't need it again.
 I just moved. I know how to leave behind
 the broken couch, the holey clothes,
 even the books I will never have time to read
 though it breaks my heart because I might need to know
 what they can teach,
 but still I can prepare to preach
 from the 15 shelves of books that made the trip.
 We know how to leave behind
 things we don't need.
 Or we like to think we do,

but we can't seem to leave behind that one failure that shames us,
 that one grudge that still claims us,
 that one strategy that once saved us but no longer serves us well.

It's hard to leave behind even things we don't need,
 harder still to leave behind what we do.

If I were Bartimaeus, I couldn't leave behind
 that which kept me warm and dry,
 that I could try to wrap around me
 as shield from derision,
 a mantle of respectability.

I cannot imagine leaving that behind,
 nor springing up to do so.

Maybe it's my old hips that lack imagination for springing
 or my heart made weary from too much leaping to conclusions in my youth,
 but how do you spring to your feet after so long on your backside?

How do you leap at hope,
 spring at possibility,
 jump at the chance to be healed
 when nothing in your life has given you reason to leap?

And how do you walk forward when you cannot see the way,
 when you cannot trust the crowd to lead you
 or to part the sea of faces now watching you hope?

But the verbs in the story speak of speed—
 he throws off his cloak, he leaps up—
 these are not the actions of a man paralyzed by doubt or fear or uncertainty.
 He certainly appears to have faith,
 and I can relate!

Most of the time.

Some of the time.

Some other time than when my mother is dying
 and my son is trying my patience
 and my daughter is trying her wings and it scares me.

Sometimes my faith is like a mustard seed—
 small and bitter—

and other times I think Jesus and I can walk on water.

Christ, have mercy on me,
for I want to cast aside my cloak of convenience.
I want to allow my leaping heart to lead.
I want to see even if the light hurts my eyes.

And when Joy says "Come here,"
I want to stay on this side of the door
unafraid
of God's unconditional love.