

Minding Our Business

Mark 10:46-52

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First Presbyterian, Luling

As Daisy and I walk each evening, we tend to encounter other dogs. I have no idea what is going on in her doggy brain, but some dogs she doesn't give a second glance, and others she explodes in a barking, jumping frenzy every time she sees them. The dogs that she ignores seem to ignore her, too. And the ones that she barks at tend to get a little frisky in return. After having gotten myself tangled up in the leash more than once, and being on the receiving end of way more than one dirty look from other dog owners, I have adopted several techniques.

First, I try to time our walks and plan out our route so that we won't encounter too many of the dogs that seem to set her off. Not everyone is predictable, so this doesn't always work as well as I would like. Second, I've been known to stop dead in our tracks and turn back to go the other way when we see the big German Shepherd with the very tiny person holding the other end of his leash. And lastly, when I just can't avoid encounters with other dogs, I've taken to saying, over and over, "Mind your business, Daisy. They're just walking down the street. Or, that's their yard. Mind your business. Mind your business." That works about as well as you might expect, which is to say, not very well at all. But it helps, enough, just often enough, that I keep trying.

By "Mind your business, Daisy," I mean, of course, that Daisy just keep walking in the same direction and at the same speed that we are already walking. I want for her to pretend that the other dog isn't there at all, that she doesn't even see them. Or if she acknowledges their presence, that it doesn't need to affect her at all. That's what I mean by "mind your business, Daisy."

I'm tempted to say "Mind your business" to the crowd in this account of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus. We've spent quite a while here in this middle section of Mark. Remembering Mark's sandwich technique, two healing stories of blind men serve as the bread to a sandwich that has a lot in the middle: the declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; the three times that Jesus says that his way leads to Jerusalem and the cross, the three times the disciples then say something silly; the transfiguration, and a whole lot of other teachings and encounters.

But as the two pieces of bread, the healing of blind men form the sandwich around all of this. The first story is found in chapter 8, where Jesus heals a blind man at Bethsaida. Jesus takes him away from everyone, outside of the village, and it takes two tries to get a complete healing, and Jesus has to touch his eyes directly, but the man is healed. Jesus tells him not to say anything to anyone and go straight home. Essentially, Jesus tells the man to mind his business, to act like nothing out of the ordinary happened, even though the villagers will certainly figure it out at some point.

Today's story, the healing of blind of Bartimaeus, couldn't be different. There's no need for Jesus to try to keep his identity a secret anymore—Peter has confessed it, he's done his best to get the disciples to understand what being the Messiah will mean. And, the very next thing that happens is the Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem and the beginning of the journey to the crucifixion. The end is near enough that there's no need for secrecy.

So this healing, rather than being outside the village, is right in the middle of Jericho, in the midst of the crowd that Jesus has attracted and that is following him around. The crowd plays an interesting role in this interaction between Jesus and Bartimaeus. First, they try to keep Bartimaeus from bugging Jesus. Much as the disciples tried to prevent the children from bothering Jesus, the crowd tries to shush Bartimaeus, who is calling out loudly, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The more they try to shush him, the louder he gets. Bartimaeus seems to have heard of Jesus and know of his reputation as a healer. He already has faith that Jesus can bring him sight and wholeness. The crowd is telling him, "Mind your business, Bartimaeus. You're not worthy to have Jesus's attention, and you

shouting like this is embarrassing.”

Rather than rebuking the crowd, as he had rebuked the disciples for preventing the children from coming, Jesus decides to use the moment to teach the crowd something less directly. Jesus certainly could have walked over to Bartimaeus, or he certainly could have called back just as loudly as Bartimaeus was calling out, but instead he gets the attention of the crowd, stands still, and says to the crowd: “call him here.”

The crowd does an immediate 180. They’ve just been shushing Bartimaeus, presumably trying to protect Jesus from him, but once Jesus notices Bartimaeus, they immediately do what Jesus has asked. They find their compassion and say, “Oh, Bartimaeus, take heart. Get up, he’s calling you.” Bartimaeus comes to Jesus, tells Jesus he wants to see again, and Jesus restores his sight. And Bartimaeus doesn’t go back to his home, doesn’t return to his spot by the road. Rather, Bartimaeus joins in and follows Jesus on the way. And Mark has made clear by now that “the way” that Bartimaeus is following on is the way to the cross, not an easy path. But he joins up enthusiastically.

There’s no way to know if this crowd is the same crowd that welcomes Jesus to Jerusalem, nor if it’s the same crowd that by Friday will yell “Crucify him!” But we’ve seen a crowd turn on a dime in this encounter with Bartimaeus, and so it’s not entirely surprising that they would again reverse themselves in the coming week.

It’s not easy to turn a crowd’s momentum, but Jesus does it simply by standing still. I think he’s also telling them to “Mind their business,” but he means something entirely different than I do when I say it to Daisy. Mind your business, and this man that you’ve just dismissed and shushed is exactly your business and my business. Love your neighbor, remember. It’s the crowd’s business that Bartimaeus is in need of healing, because he is their neighbor.

It’s easy to go along with the crowd, no matter which way they’re going. It’s easy to get wrapped up in cruelty, when it’s what everyone else is doing. But the presence and command of Jesus can change the momentum of a crowd and remind them of his call. It’s also easy to think that “mind your business” means ignoring everything and everyone around you. But Jesus shows the crowd, and shows us, that “mind your business” instead means the opposite—noticing, and valuing, and loving, everyone around you. The crowd learned a lesson that day, and it was likely a lesson they’d need to be taught again. But as we follow Jesus on the way, even the way to the cross, we also follow his command to love our neighbors.