**Blind Bartimaeus**

We used this well-known Bible story in our MULOA process but there is still a lot we can learn from it as we reflect on Jesus’ heart of compassion and how we may be able to reach those who could be "left out" or "vulnerable" at this time. It also helps us reflect on the importance of good listening as a way of valuing others, particularly in this time of physical isolation.

Read this passage slowly, allowing it to speak to your mind, heart and emotions.

## *Mark 10: 46-52 (NIV)*

## *Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’*

## *Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’*

## *Jesus stopped and said, ‘Call him.’*

## *So they called to the blind man, ‘Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.’*

## *Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.*

## *‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him.*

## *The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see.’*

## *‘Go,’ said Jesus, ‘your faith has healed you.’*

## *Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.*

**Reflect:**

1. At this time, when the numbers of ‘vulnerable’ people have dramatically increased and where we are physically isolated, who might Bartimaeus represent in your own community?
2. Reflect on how Jesus responded to Bartimaeus. Why did he respond with a question?
3. Consider how the story might have been different if Jesus had simply assumed that Bartimaeus wanted to see again rather than ask what he wanted Jesus to do for him?
4. What does this show us about the need to ask people what they actually want rather than assuming their need? Can you think of an example of this in your own experience?
5. What can we learn from Jesus’s encounter with Bartimaeus about how we may best respond to people who are vulnerable at this time?

In some ways we are all like Bartimaeus, lacking in vision and in need of help from Jesus (which may be different from what others assume.) Take some time to call out to Jesus, ignoring the hubbub of life around you, and answer the question he asks 'What do you want me to do for you?'

Then pray for wisdom as to how best you may be able to use your own gifts and resources to benefit the vulnerable in your community, particularly during this challenging time.

## **The Power of Listening**

## This Bible study helps us to appreciate the power of listening. Jesus knows each of us deeply and completely, and he is the only one who can truly know us in this way. However, as his followers who seek to love and respond as he does, we want to try to know others at the heart of who they are and that does mean actively listening to them.

As we become those who actively listen, we are more able to understand people’s real, rather than perceived, needs and we are better able to address what actually matters to them.

Developing good listening skills is vital for:

* Learning and understanding
* Clarifying an issue
* Stopping us making assumptions
* Building trust and confidence
* Affirming people as being valuable and significant, and worth listening to – this is a spiritual act

To be effective listeners, we must learn to listen to the whole person – not just the actual words they are saying but also what the person is trying to say and what lies behind the words. There are three levels of listening that enable us to ask the right questions, to learn and to build strong relationships.

* Listening to the head – to thoughts, facts, arguments and ideas. This is the most obvious way to listen and requires attentiveness to the speaker’s words
* Listening to the heart – the feelings, emotions, mood, experience and the values behind them
* Listening to the feet – the intentions, energy and motivations of the speaker. Skilful listening can help discover what is behind the thoughts and below the feelings involved.

When we listen with purpose we are more attentive than we might otherwise be; engaging not only our ears, but our minds, our bodies and indeed our souls. We will be listening with our whole beings.

The father of a child with autism shared this insight into his non-verbal child’s yearning to be heard.

'I cannot talk! But I am talking to you all the time. You just need to… listen. Without your ears.'

As we seek to reach out to those around us, whether a vulnerable "Bartimaeus" or the person in the crowd whose life appears to be "sorted", we need to listen not just with our ears but with our whole beings.

The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and to be understood.

‘The best way to understand people is to listen to them.’ *Ralph G. Nichols*