

The Way of Exclusion

People – like Bartimaeus, the psalmist, and Job in this week’s readings – cry out to God for different reasons. Some cry from places of exclusion and frustration, some from places of joy and thanksgiving, and some from places of confusion and desperation. We discover that God responds in different ways. God heals, God listens, and God offers renewal. As a result, we can experience a renewed faith and deepened desire to follow God’s ways.

Focus scripture: Mark 10:46–52

This is not a simple story about an individual with a disability; nor is it a simple story about physical cure for someone who is blind. Instead, this is a more complicated story about a person being restored back to their community.

In biblical times, a person with any disability was an outcast, physically excluded from the rest of the community, and regulated to the fringes of society. Bartimaeus, who was blind, was no exception to this. Bartimaeus was a beggar with few other choices in life because of his blindness. Separated from others in his community, living in poverty and on the margins of society, it is little wonder that when Bartimaeus hears Jesus is in the area, he cries out and begs for mercy. Bartimaeus wants his sight back. When he makes his request, he is told that his faith has made him well; immediately he can see.

Many of the biblical stories are similar to this story about Bartimaeus. A person with a disability asks Jesus to heal them and they are physically healed; they can suddenly see, hear, walk, or talk. Healing stories such as this have caused pain for people living with disabilities today.

Today, some people also pray and cry out to Jesus as Bartimaeus did. For many, their disabilities remain. Why has their faith not made them well? Are they not people of faith as well? Of course, they are! Unfortunately, many well-meaning church people tell them, or suggest, that their faith must be insufficient. Thus, when healing does not take place, it can bring a crisis of faith. But physical healing is not the whole point of the biblical healing stories.

These gospel stories are not just, or even primarily, about curing a physical ailment. Instead, the stories are about people who have been excluded being restored back to the community. The healing that Jesus offers goes beyond the physical; it is about relationships transformed, community re-imaged, and finding identity in Christ. This kind of healing is also about recognizing that if one is excluded, the community is not whole. The healing of an individual and bringing them back into the community brings the community a bit closer to God’s realm.

The miracle of this story is Jesus’ ability to transform exclusion and to help Bartimaeus and the community to see. Upon receiving new life, Bartimaeus leaves everything and follows Jesus.

Job also recognized God’s power and greatness in **Job 42:1–6, 10–17**. Rather than being upset with a less-than-direct answer to his demands for a hearing with God, Job experiences a renewed faith. **Psalm 34:1–8, (19–22)** addresses the issue of crying out to God as well; this time the writer repeatedly praises God for listening. While the answers may not be what were sought, the writer celebrates God’s liberating ways. In **Hebrews 7:23–28**, it is Christ who cries out, interceding with God on our behalf.

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God offers a response to the cries of the people in each story. In the case of Bartimaeus, Jesus challenges the ways of exclusion. He heals the community. Have you ever cried out to God? How did God respond? When have you experienced healing in your community?



Focus scripture

Mark 10:46–52

Additional scriptures

Job 42:1–6, 10–17

Psalm 34:1–8, (19–22)

Hebrews 7:23–28



Seasons of the Spirit

is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

For materials for Reformation Day, go to www.seasonsonline.ca, click on the Library tab.

God of community, sometimes we erect barriers that exclude. Sometimes we isolate and alienate one another. But your community is bigger than we can ever imagine! Challenge our ways of exclusion. Heal us from our arrogance. Open our hearts so we might live in ways that create better places of belonging for all. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.seasonsonline.ca to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.



The Focus for Adults

For materials for Reformation Day and All Saints Day, go to www.seasonsonline.ca, click on the Library tab.

Caution is always needed when exploring the gospel healing narratives, as they can assume the person seeking to heal is somehow less than whole. There is often an implication that illness or disability is someone's fault (such as a punishment for sin), that they somehow "deserve" their current condition, and that it is *faith* that brings a cure.

It is more helpful to explore how the healing narratives are examples of systemic exclusion. Blindness excludes Bartimaeus from community life. With his sight restored, the community now includes him. Still, although Bartimaeus himself is restored to community life, the structures that exclude are still in place.

This week offers opportunity to explore who is excluded from society today, and what structures or systems have that caused this, and how we might we break down structures and systems that exclude.

Many people follow the saying "don't rock the boat." Some are not able to speak or act for

fear of what others might think. They may not want to be labelled as complainers or agitators and find it easier to be quiet about their own needs or those of others. Some in your group may have wanted to speak out on behalf of another or themselves only to feel discouraged or intimidated.

This week's focus scripture explores the story of one who took the risk to cry out. It is a gospel/good news story because of what it tells. Jesus takes notice of this one who cries out. It is important how we express this – words like "God is with you" or "Jesus cares about you" need to be shared with a deep sensitivity to people's situations. Being present with others through empathy is ultimately better than quick, glib lines that could leave another feeling a failure. Hold your group in prayer. Some of them may be intimately aware of the experience of Bartimaeus. Some of them may be in a position to help another, if only they could find cause to speak out and "take heart."

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Job 42:1–6, 10–17; Psalm 34:1–8 (19–22); Mark 10:46–52; Hebrews 7:23–28, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 51).
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit www.seasonsonline.ca and click on *Spirit Sightings*. Bring information that might inform this week's session.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, and [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, and Bible.
- ❑ Bring resource sheet "[Gathering Prayers](#)" (p. 81) and choose one of the prayers.

- ❑ Bring, if possible, "To You, O God" (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Dig deeper:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Name Clues](#)"
- ❑ **Litany:** no additional materials needed
- ❑ **Speaking out:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Crying Out](#)"
- ❑ **Spiritual practice:** Christ candle, Bible, bell/singing bowl

Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song, "Listen Now for the Gospel" (p. 23 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #25 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- ❑ Bring copies of [biblical background](#) material for November 4 (p. 57).



The Way of Exclusion

Scripture

Mark 10:46–52

FOCUS To speak persistently when we face barriers that block us or others from community and discipleship.

Gather

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space and invite a volunteer to light the candle.

Pray Lead the group in one of the prayers on the resource sheet “*Gathering Prayers*” (p. 81).

Sing or listen to, if possible, “To You, O God” (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Moving into the theme

Recall a moment in your life when you did not understand an event or a conversation as it was taking place but could “see” it very clearly when looking back on it later.

- **What or who helped you gain a new understanding?**

Engage

Setting the context

This is the last of the stories in Mark’s gospel before Jesus’ final entry into Jerusalem. Several of the stories in the preceding chapters tell about the struggle of the disciples to understand what it means to follow Jesus. This concluding narrative introduces a character whose struggle is not how to follow, but simply to be heard.

Exploring the texts

Mark 10:46–52 Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, is healed, and is restored back to community.

- **How do you understand the healing that took place in this story?**
- **Why do you think that Jesus chose to heal in this way?**
- **If someone asked you about Christ’s acts of healing, how might you respond?**

The disciples rebuke Bartimaeus, telling him to be quiet. Jesus responds by bringing Bartimaeus to the centre of the gathered community.

- **What are some of the barriers to Bartimaeus finding wholeness?**
- **How did Jesus challenge ways of exclusion?**
- **How are the disciples changed as a result of this encounter?**
- **When society – or even the church – seeks to push people to the periphery, or keep them at arm’s-length, what might cause you to speak or act for others or yourself?**

The question that Jesus asks in Mark 10:51 is the same question he asks the disciples in Mark 10:36.

- **What is significant about how the disciples, and then Bartimaeus, respond to this inquiry?**
- **If Jesus asked you, “What do you want me to do for you?” How would you respond?**

The story of Bartimaeus being healed raises questions for many.

- **How do you experience or understand the activity of God when healing or cure appears not to happen or isn’t obvious?**

Other readings Job 42:1–6, 10–17 Job’s response to God is intriguing. Instead of saying, “Thanks, God, but you didn’t really answer my question,” Job recognizes that God is God. Compared to all God has done and continues to do in the world, Job now sees his suffering differently. Imagine for a moment that you are Job.

- **How do you feel about God’s response? What more would you have liked to hear?**

Job finds his fortunes restored several times over.

- **Can the new things Job receives truly compensate for all he has lost?**

Form two groups and assign each group one of the additional readings: Psalm 34:1–8 (19–22) and Hebrews 7:23–28.

- **In what ways is persistence revealed or encouraged?**

Making life connections

Bartimaeus would not be silenced and Jesus did not ignore his cry for justice and mercy. Both speak and act.

- **Who in your community or church are silenced or kept in the background?**

- **What might people do individually and as the church to affirm the faith of all?**
- **What persistence is needed in a community of equals?**

Respond

Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Dig deeper: significance of naming**  The focus passage from the gospel includes some clues about Mark's community and about the gospel itself. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Name Clues" and review the material together. Invite comments, and discuss the questions included on the resource sheet.
- **Litany** The invitation to speak for others calls us to recognize and acknowledge those who need our intercession. Invite group members to spend a few moments reflecting quietly on those who may be crying out for recognition or help in their own lives and in the life of their community, nation, or the world, and those who might be seeking to silence these people. As a group, make a list of those crying out and those saying "be quiet." Create a litany together, naming those who are crying out, those who are trying to silence them, and what Jesus might say in response. 
- **Speaking out** People are crying out for justice and healing in many places today. And there are those

who are speaking out on their behalf. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Crying Out" and read about these groups. Invite participants to name other groups which they are familiar with and to share stories of experiences they have had in this kind of solidarity and advocacy work. What could the group cry out about in their own community? How might this group become involved in community or denominational projects?

- **Spiritual practice – Silence** Set a table with only a simple Christ candle and a "singing bowl" or bell. To begin, sound the bowl/bell and invite members to let their consciousness "follow the sound into silence." Pause, and then read Mark 10:46–52 into the silence. Sit in silence for at least five to ten minutes so people can sink into stillness. At the end of the silent time, sound the bell/bowl again. Offer the following prayer or one of your own: "O God, the breath within our breath, the silence in our stillness, the peace within our hearts, grant us the spirit, wisdom, and strength to live and move and have our being in you, now and always. Amen."

Bless

Gather around the lit candle. Read Psalm 34:4–8. Invite participants to summarize the wisdom they gleaned from the session about the call to speak out for others and ourselves, working together to overcome barriers.

Sing or listen to, if possible, the song "Listen Now for the Gospel" (p. 23 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #25 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

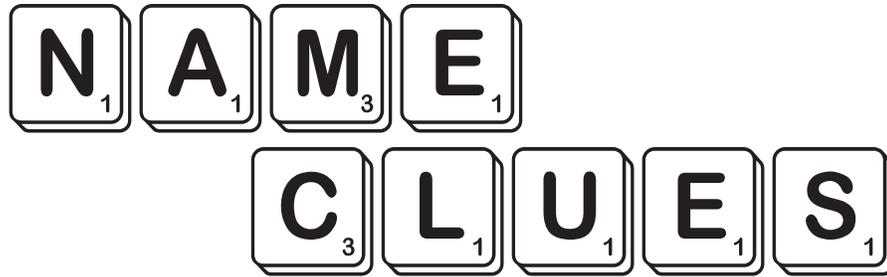
Pray the prayer on the [biblical background](#) page (p. 51).

Blessing Offer the following words of blessing: "May you be opened to see clearly and to follow in the way of discipleship."

Distribute the [biblical background](#) material for November 4 (p. 57). Invite participants to bring photos of people who have been important in their faith journey for next week's session.

Reflect

The encouragement to "take heart" may be difficult for those who have been silenced or put down when they have sought to speak or act for themselves or others. In what ways did group members encourage one another to "take heart"?



The story of Bartimaeus is only mentioned once in the New Testament, in the account in Mark 10:46–52. What clues can we find in this story to better understand Mark’s gospel and community?

Bar Bartimaeus is identified as “the son of Timaeus” (verse 46). In Hebrew or Aramaic, “bar” as a prefix means “son of.” A Palestinian Christian community would have known whose son Bar-timaeus was without saying so. This is a clue that among those for whom the gospel of Mark was first written were Greek-speaking, Gentile followers of Jesus. (There is a tradition that Peter was the source of Mark’s stories and that the church(es) of Rome were Mark’s audience.)

Son of David As Jesus comes through Jericho, Bartimaeus calls out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (verse 47). Bartimaeus names Jesus in a way that no one else in Mark’s gospel, including the disciples, has used: “Son of David.” Bartimaeus also refers to Jesus as “my teacher,” or Rabbi, another term that had not been used by others. This offers a clue that it is Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, who sees Jesus most clearly.

Named and unnamed Mark’s gospel is filled with references to individuals who are unnamed: the majority of those whom Jesus heals or exorcises in the early chapters, the woman who anoints Jesus (14:3–9), even the scribe whom Jesus praises as not being far from the kingdom (12:34). Yet some specific individuals are named in this gospel. For example, when someone is needed to carry Jesus’ cross, Mark identifies Simon of Cyrene, adding that this Simon is “the father of Alexander and Rufus” (15:21).

■ Why might we refer to the name of someone in our conversation with another person?

■ When would we leave specific names out of our conversations?

If we use a name when our conversation partners know that person then maybe that is what the writer of Mark’s gospel is doing. He seems comfortable leaving a number of individuals unnamed to the community he addresses – but not Simon the father of Alexander and Rufus, and not Bartimaeus. In the case of Alexander and Rufus, there is some textual evidence that points to leaders in the early church bearing those names. It also could be so with Bartimaeus. The blind beggar whom others wanted to shush may have become someone whom Mark’s community knew and valued as a partner in the gospel.

In Mark’s gospel, sight is used as a metaphor for faith in Jesus.

■ What does this story of Bartimaeus, and the naming of Bartimaeus and of Jesus, add to our understanding of what it means to be faithful followers?

■ What do you think the story – and name – of Bartimaeus suggests about the importance of the names we use and remember today?



Crying Out

Women in Black

Women in Black is a worldwide network of women committed to peace with justice and actively opposed to injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. Demonstrations involve only women and usually take the form of women wearing black and standing silently in a public place at regular intervals in non-violent vigils. The organization began in Israel in 1988 when a group of Israeli, Palestinian, and American women protested Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

It was inspired by earlier movements of women who demonstrated on the streets, making a public space for women to be heard, particularly the Black Sash in South Africa, and the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, seeking the "disappeared" in the political repression in Argentina. But WIB also shares a genealogy with groups of women explicitly refusing violence, militarism and war, such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom formed in 1918 and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the United Kingdom in the eighties.

Asylum Seeker Resource Centres

All over Australia, Resource Centres have opened their doors to help those seeking asylum in Australia have their human rights upheld and to provide aid, advocacy, and health services. Many asylum seekers in Australia have been held for years in detention centres, and have been crying out, longing for their stories to be heard. One person said, "I used to be an artist in my own country; now I'm just a number." What has become the largest asylum seeker organisation in Australia opened in Melbourne in 2001. In its first nine years they assisted over 7000 people seeking asylum, helping them to feel welcome, safe, and supported. Volunteers have provided more than 1 million hours campaigning and lobbying, speaking out against the appalling and inhumane detentions.

Raging Grannies

The original *Raging Grannies* group began in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada in the winter of 1986-87. Eight women, mostly grandmothers, were concerned about nuclear proliferation and decided to get their message across by singing protest songs. Today gaggles of Raging Grannies take to the streets in countries around the world, dressed in outlandish "granny clothes," to sing in places where they are often unexpected and unwanted. They write their own songs and set them to familiar tunes, and the witty, satirical lyrics are tailored to specific groups. They appear at shareholders' meetings, city hall, and board meetings, wherever they can catch people's attention. They have added environmental, justice, and peace issues to their repertoire and dedicate their work to the children of the world.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International began "crying out" in 1961, campaigning to stop the abuse of human rights. Today it is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories. In each of these countries volunteers write letters, participate in public demonstrations and vigils, sign petitions, engage in human rights education, and mobilize the public to put pressure on governments, armed political groups, companies and intergovernmental bodies. Their vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

For more information about these voices crying out for healing and justice, go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the Links tab.

Gathering Prayers

Creator God,
Open our ears to the voice of wisdom
that we hear in many ways.

_____ Open our lives to your creating, guiding, love. Amen.

Loving God, you receive us with grace.

May we discern, in the scriptures and our conversations,
the call to be an embodiment of your love. Amen. _____

May we take heart, O God,
in your presence that opens to us,
in your power that brings wholeness,

_____ and in your grace that invites our own gracious response. Amen.

We give thanks, O God,
for your presence in our lives.

We give thanks for people in our community
who bear your presence to us.

In our turning to you, O God,
turn us toward one another. Amen. _____

God of all time and place,
May we be open to your Spirit,
sustained with hope and faith in your presence,

_____ and strengthened to create places of sanctuary for all. Amen.

One: From our busyness and pressure, we call to you.

All: Be our quiet centre, O God *(pause)*.

One: From our lack of faith and blindness, we call to you.

All: Be our vision, O God *(pause)*.

One: From our worries and fears, we call to you.

All: Be our peace, O God *(pause)*.

One: From our good times and success, we call to you.

All: Be our hope, O God *(pause)*.

All: Amen. _____

