

The phrase, "They Walk Among Us!" has come into use to identify a range of brief, humorous, stories or quips, sometimes featured in the Darwin Awards or "News of the weird." The following are a few examples of "They Walk Among Us!" stories:

One day I was walking down the beach with some friends when someone shouted, "Look at that dead bird!" Someone looked up at the sky and said, "Where?" They Walk among us!!

I used to work in technical support for a 24/7 call center. One day I got a call from an individual who asked what hours the call center was open. I told him, "The number you dialed is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week." He responded, "Is that Eastern or Pacific time?" Wanting to end the call quickly, I said, "Uh, Pacific" . . . They Walk Among Us!!!

My colleague and I were eating our lunch in our cafeteria, when we overheard one of the administrative assistants talking about the sunburn she got on her weekend drive to the shore. She drove down in a convertible, but "didn't think she'd get sunburned because the car was moving". They Walk Among Us!!!!

I couldn't find my luggage at the airport baggage area. So I went to the lost luggage office and told the woman there that my bags never showed up. She smiled and told me not to worry because she was a trained professional and I was in good hands. "Now," she asked me, "has your plane arrived yet?"... They Walk Among Us!

They Walk Among Us! or actually "They Sit among us!" was what the crowd were thinking and feeling that day in Jericho when poor, old, blind, crazy, smelly, pitiful, Bartimaeus, kept on shouting and screaming and making a fuss and trying to get Jesus' attention – oh how embarrassing for him to make a spectacle of himself, didn't his mother teach him how to behave in public, can't someone shut him up!

To Jesus this Jericho brouhaha was not a bother, and today, as we allow this event to get inside of us, we have much to gain! This Jericho brouhaha tells us a lot about who Jesus is, about how Jesus deals with people, and what Jesus expects from us who today seek to as disciples and followers of Jesus!

Thanks to this Jericho brouhaha everything is about to come into focus! Not only blind Bartimaeus but everybody who witnesses this scene, is about to be given the opportunity to "see" again. Now quiet and respectful after his extended outburst, Bartimaeus finds himself in the presence of Jesus. Jesus asks him a question that I hope you will recognize from last week's Gospel reading. Jesus asks Bart, "What

do you want me to do for you?” This is the very same question that we heard Jesus ask last week when James and John made their very unsavory request of Jesus, asking that they be granted season tickets for the Masters, a box at the Met, a skybox suite for the Superbowl, plus very special recognition and privileges in the Kingdom of God! Jesus gave them a pretty curt and, to them, unsatisfactory answer!

To this same question “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus offers a much more appropriate answer. The two star struck brothers from last week are like Mayor Quimby – looking for recognition and the best seats, Bart is fulfilling the promise of the kingdom sign that the blind will see!

From Bartimaeus we discover that to see with the eyes of faith is to have eyes wide open! To underline this point Mark chose to place this incident immediately before the report of Jesus’ Triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. You see everything was coming into focus, just as Jesus had promised! Everything was about to be made clear, in the only way that was possible! Everybody was about to have the opportunity to see, to really see, all because Jesus was about to reach and enter where His road needed to take Him, Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the holy city, where Jesus would be condemned and arrested and flogged and spat upon and taken off to die, bearing in His life the weight of the world’s rejection of God so we could be welcomed by God. And so it is that Bartimaeus is the first to raise the “Son of David” shout that will be echoed in the events of Palm Sunday! “Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is the One who comes in the Name of the Lord.”

As the result of this encounter Bart followed Jesus. You see Bart and Homer, and Marge, and Lisa and Maggie and Grandpa – they could all follow Jesus like Ned Flanders! Heck even Willy the groundskeeper with the wild Scottish accent can follow Jesus!! Thanks be to God you and I, all of us, having recognized who Jesus truly is can follow Jesus to life! When we see our lives, when we see our world, bathed in the light of Jesus - all of us can follow Jesus!

As Jesus invited Bartimaeus to follow, so Christ calls us to a new way of life. The faith we have inside of us, which we share with those around us and with the Church of every age and place, the faith that is God’s gift to us, is the faith of Jesus Christ.

This faith, the faith of Jesus Christ, opens our eyes to see God’s love transforming our lives and so we follow!

This faith, the faith of Jesus Christ, opens our eyes to see God’s love present and active to change our world and so we follow!

This faith, the faith of Jesus Christ, brings to us a starting over, a beginning again, a turning around, a new direction, an extreme makeover inside and so we follow!

This faith, the faith of Jesus Christ is this - God holds us and the world in love, and has a purpose, a life's work, a vocation, a calling, which is that we follow Jesus!

Many of us here today have said and are saying our "Yes" to Jesus.

Some are still to say and truly live into our first "Yes" to following Jesus!

Some of us are closer to saying our "Yes" to Jesus today than we have ever been before.

Yet not one of us has yet said our complete and total "YES" to following Jesus!

My friends this is why Jesus comes into the brouhaha of your life to ask you, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus had to throw aside his cloak to take those first difficult, unseen, uncertain steps towards Jesus. What is it that you need to throw aside so you will be free to follow Jesus? Pride? Prejudice? Anger? Jealousy? Resentment? Fear? Past failures?

Bartimaeus had to lay down his cloak to start out on what became a new life's journey. What is it that cloaks who you really and truly are, obscuring, masking your true identity and destiny as a child of God that must be laid down? Trusting in wealth? Over reliance on self? Dependence on that which can only harm you if you let it define your life – whisky or pot or porn?

Bartimaeus had to step away from his beggar's perch, to leave behind the familiar, to step forward into a new tomorrow, to leave his usual corner and step out onto the highway. What corners of your existence do you need to be ready to leave? The places that are so familiar to you, that have a known look and smell but hold no promise for tomorrow? The people and relationships that drag you into bad places? The fears that eat away at your God-given promise? The aches and itches that distract?

Bartimaeus had to be ready to risk so much, maybe even his all to discover in following Jesus a guarantee of life, and hope, and peace and joy. To what extent are you ready to risk much so that you can follow Jesus and so be able to accept the lasting blessing of God on your life?

The fact that we know Bartimaeus' name implies that he was known in the early church. Bart was one of them, one of us, one who followed Jesus! Unlike the rich young ruler who turned away, because he was a rich man, Bart followed Jesus!

I tell you that it is the compassion of Jesus that changed Bartimaeus' life.

It is the compassion of Jesus that has changed and continues to change my life.

It is the compassion of Jesus that I see in you as you live and serve and give and share.

Compassion is the spirit of the way of Jesus Christ. Compassion is the spirit of Jesus all the way to the Cross, through the Cross and beyond the Cross and so compassion must be and needs to be the spirit of who we are as the Christian community as together we follow Jesus!

Like Bartimaeus we are even today in the presence of Jesus, like Bartimaeus we have Jesus' attention, like Bartimaeus we have the opportunity to step up and reach out in faith and joy, following Jesus together as we do the work to which Jesus calls us in and through the life of Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church.

Aware that we have been called to an active following – as our response to the deep, lasting, tender compassion that Jesus has for us, please recognize the Bartimaeus in you, in your life. You know, don't you, your need for care, guidance and compassion in your lives? On our own we know we are lost, despite all our best intentions when we live without reference to our Lord we are sunk! The compassion of Jesus invites us to reach out to Jesus, the Son of David for our life, our healing, our salvation!

Aware that we have been called to an active following – let us allow the deep and lasting compassion of Jesus to motivate us into action, to change how we live, to propel us into new avenues of service, to stir in us new thoughts, new feelings, new attitudes towards one another, towards all our neighbors, towards even our enemies.

Aware that we have been called to an active following – let us express God's compassion for us, for the church and for the world by means of what we pledge and commit from all that we have for God's mission through the life of our church.

Today we have the opportunity to have Jesus say to us "Go; your faith has made you well" and to begin all over again to live a new life following our Lord! Amen.