



Fear Undone



A Sermon By
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Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

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<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-10-25-AAA.mp3>.

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The Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost
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Jeremiah 31:7-9
Hebrews 7:23-28
Psalm 126
Mark 10:46-52

Earlier this week, Jeanean Thomas from Cambridge, Ontario took her six year old daughter Peyton to their local skate park. When they arrived at the park, they noticed that it was full of teenagers acting like they owned the place. Peyton uncomfortably voiced this observation to her mother, “Mom, it’s full of older boys,” she said. Jeanean tried to encourage her daughter, “So what, they don’t own the skate park,” she told her. The mother-daughter duo hadn’t been at the skate park for very long when one of the teens approached them. What happened next surprised both Peyton and Jeanean, and inspired Jeanean to write an open letter to the teen which she posted on her Twitter account later that night. Within 24 hours, Jeanean’s letter went viral on social media. The letter reads:

Dear teenage boy at the skate park:

You’re probably about 15 years-old, so I don’t expect you to be very mature or for you to want a little girl on your skate ramp for that matter. What you don’t know is that my daughter has been wanting to skateboard for months. I actually had to convince her that skateboarding wasn’t for just for boys. So when we walked up to the skate park and saw that it was full of teenaged boys who were smoking and swearing, she immediately wanted to turn around and go home. I secretly wanted to go too because I didn’t want to have to put on my mom voice and exchange words with you. I also didn’t want my daughter to feel like she had to be scared of anyone, or that she wasn’t entitled to that skate park just as much as you were. So when she said, “Mom it’s full of older boys,” I calmly said, “So what, they don’t own the skate park.” She proceeded to go down the ramp in spite of you and your friends flying past her and grinding rails beside her. She only had two or three runs in before you approached her and said “Hey, excuse me...” I immediately prepared to deliver my “She’s allowed to use this park just as much as you guys” speech when I heard you say, “Your feet are wrong. Can I help you?” You proceeded to spend almost an hour with my daughter showing her how to balance and steer, and she listened to you – a feat not attained by most adults. You held her hand and helped her get up when she fell down and I even heard you tell her to stay away from the rails so that she wouldn’t get hurt. I want you to know that I am proud that you are part of my community, and I want to thank you for being kind to my daughter, even though your friends made fun of you for it. She left the skate park with a sense of pride and with the confidence that she can do anything, because of you.

You can understand why Jeanean’s letter went viral, can’t you? Her writing presents images of kindness, community, and trust that was all the more precious because it was unlooked for. What

occurred in that Cambridge skate park left Jeanean feeling hopeful and proud. And the day's events left her daughter, Peyton feeling empowered.

But what if Peyton never went to the skate park? What if Jeanean, instead of encouraging her daughter's desire to skate, gave into Peyton's fear and didn't push her? What if the mother-daughter duo gave into timidity? It wouldn't have been the end of the world, but... Peyton would have missed out on this new life-giving activity. Jeanean would have missed seeing her daughter learn and grow and blossom. And the teenage Good Samaritan would have missed this teaching moment. When we give into them, fear and timidity stunt us.

I think Bartimaeus in our Gospel story must have known this to be true. And like Peyton and Jeanean, he didn't let fear or timidity destroy with his hope. There he was, sitting by the roadside outside of Jericho, a blind beggar. He could not see the masses of people approaching him on the road but I imagine he could hear them and feel the vibrations of their footsteps on the ground. Upon learning that the crowd was on the road because Jesus was traveling in their midst, Bartimaeus wasted no time. He shouted out for Jesus, vying for his attention.

Clearly Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus. He knew the stories of healings and miracles that Jesus had done. And so he cried out, even when the crowd shunned him and tried to shut him up. Nothing kept Bartimaeus silent – not fear or timidity or hindrance. He had faith that Jesus could and would heal his blindness if only he could capture Jesus' attention. And as we hear, he did. Jesus instructs the crowd to call Bartimaeus to him. Then he asks Bartimaeus what he wants him to do for him. Bartimaeus boldly names his need to Jesus. "My teacher, let me see again."

As we hear, Jesus heals him because of his faith. But it was more than faith alone that healed Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus spoke up! He could have remained sitting on the roadside, begging food and money from the passing crowd, believing that Jesus could have healed him but never speaking up out of fear or judgment or any other number of reasons. But he didn't. Bartimaeus spoke up. Even when the crowd tried to shut him up, he continued to speak out with bold audacity.

Bartimaeus' story invites us to ask some interesting questions about our relationship with God. How often do we courageously come right out and ask for what we need? How often do we absolutely demand to be heard by God in our neediness? In our culture, being needy is often a sign of weakness. Likewise, expressing vulnerability is often an invitation to contempt or abuse. We often feel like we need to put on a good face and pretend things are going well even when they aren't.

We seem to think that what people most value in us is the fact that we don't need them, and that God likely feels the same way. Our mistake, of course, is that God already knows our fears and anxieties, and our struggles. And God wants nothing more than to help us heal and to empower us to achieve greater freedom and abundance. And if we hide our need we aren't really available to receive the healing God wants to offer. Bartimaeus' act is an act of faith and courage. Not only isn't he hiding his need, he is boldly shouting his need to the world, fairly hurling it at Jesus' feet. Because he did this, because he let it "all hang out," everything can be released.

Think for a moment about your own life, your own story. Do you make time to reflect on what's going on in your life and what needs you might have? Bartimaeus' need was pretty obvious. He wanted to see. He needed healing. Perhaps our needs are not quite as obvious. We may need to make time to self reflect, to be in tune with ourselves – our gifts, our wants, and our needs so that we can boldly name them and share them with God and with other people who can support us. That's not to say we'll get exactly what we want. It doesn't work that way. God's not a genie... But when we articulate our needs, naming our hopes boldly, amazing things can happen.

Bartimaeus' story reminds me of the importance of faith AND the importance of acting boldly. Fear and timidity have the tendency to stifle our growth. When we act audaciously, braving the unknown, great things can happen. Just ask six-year-old Peyton or her mom Jeanean. Ask Bartimaeus. I invite you to join them in boldly stepping out in faith. You may be surprised at what happens next. Amen.