



## Week 1 Preaching Resources: Hearing Other Voices

### Scripture Passage:

Mark 10:46-52

### Focus Statement:

We can be so busy on our mission that we stop listening. Yet, as Christians, we cannot fully engage in our mission without taking the time to hear the voices on the side of the road.

### ME:

Tell a story about a time in your life when you were so focused on a task that you missed an opportunity to connect with someone.

### WE:

We as a church can be so focused on our "plans" that we ignore the people on the wayside, especially those who are "different" from us in some way, or many ways. This can be true even when we have the best intentions of serving others. Tell a story about when this has been true in any church you have served.

### GOD:

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, an outsider of society, knew who Jesus was and shouted, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Correctly naming who Jesus was demonstrated that he had a voice and knew how to use it in the world, despite the fact that he was blind and poor. While not everyone has a voice (some people are nonverbal), we all have value and inherent worth, regardless of our differences and what others may think of us. Marginalized people are often able to recognize the presence and work of God and connect with it in ways that advantaged people do not, just as Bartimaeus identified Jesus as the Son of David and called him into this sacred moment of healing. Even though Jesus was on his way to face his biggest challenge, he stopped to listen to Bartimaeus.

The people following Jesus tried to quiet Bartimaeus because they were focused on the task at hand, but Jesus stopped to listen. Jesus did not just use his ears but listened with his heart and spirit. He was open to who Bartimaeus was and what he may need. He did not presume to know what Bartimaeus needed, just like we don't presume to know what someone who is different from us may need. Jesus made room for Bartimaeus by asking "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus demonstrated that we must first make room in ourselves: in our hearts, churches, and communities, before we can receive others. We should not assume we know what a person needs based solely on our own worldview or cultural perspective.



Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, which was of great importance to him. He was willing to give up what was meaningful to him in order to go to Jesus, to respond to Jesus calling him. What things of value (e.g., traditions, worship styles) may we need to give up to respond to Jesus' call on our lives in this moment? Are there things we cling to because they make us comfortable, but that might be impeding our call to faith?

### YOU:

In today's society, with information coming at us from all directions, it is important to stop and listen. Have you ever just stopped what you were doing to listen? Hear and respect the voices of all those with whom you come into contact. Keep your heart open to where God is already present and how God is already moving.

### WE:

What voices are we as a church not hearing or are resistant to hearing? How would our church be different if we listened to those voices? How can we as a church be more intentional about hearing the voices on the road? How would our church communities and ministries change if we incorporated these voices? In light of our encounter with Jesus, how is God calling us to make space for others as a church, community and world? This week think of one or two ways to become more aware of the voices on the side of the road and how we can create space for them.



## Week 2 Preaching Resources: Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves

### Scripture Passage:

Numbers 27:1-11

### Focus Statement:

Last week, we saw the importance of listening to the voices on the margins. However, it is not enough to just listen. We must also act.

### ME:

Tell a story about a time when you experienced or learned of something that compelled you to act.

### WE:

Tell a story or reflect on a time when your church community heard about or saw a story of inequity and felt moved to act on behalf of the other. For example, in the COVID-19 pandemic, many congregations and communities heard stories of frontline healthcare workers' continued service and were moved to act by sending cards and protective equipment to hospitals or driving into hospital parking lots to pray. Or maybe your congregation created a program to secure identification cards for those who did not have them, allowing them to access resources in the community.

### GOD:

Ancient Israelite tradition gave the right of inheritance to sons only. Women were thus not able to inherit property. However, despite this cultural practice, Zelophehad's daughters challenged the tradition of their time by speaking to the leaders. When their father died, Zelophehad's daughters, all named in the text, asked Moses and the other leaders for their father's property.

When the women spoke to the leaders, the leaders did not dismiss their appeal but instead listened and took it to God. God listened to the daughters and affirmed them saying, "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right." Because of this, the legal code was re-written to give the inheritance to one's daughters if they had no sons. Biblically, this is not an isolated incident. Jesus openly challenged laws and traditions that were exclusive by nature. He saw the image of God reflected in those whom society deemed unworthy and enthusiastically invited them into the Kingdom of God.

God will step in to break tradition in order to bring justice to those who, up until now, have been excluded or deemed unworthy. But God includes us in bringing about justice. The women stood up for what they believed to be right. They acted on their convictions. Likewise, Moses first listened and then *acted*.



### YOU:

Was there a time when some long-held tradition or practice stopped you from receiving what you needed or felt was a basic human right? For instance, have you been challenged at the voting booth, or faced difficulties purchasing a house in a neighborhood where the residents did not look like you?

Was there a time when a long-held tradition discouraged or intimidated you from acting on behalf of someone else, particularly, someone excluded by that tradition?

### WE:

In this text, God extended the table wider to include those at the margins: women. We have a lot of traditions in our churches, communities, and world. Sometimes we are not sure why the traditions exist in the first place. Some even inadvertently exclude people. How is God calling us to widen our table to include people and voices that have been excluded? Who do we need to listen to and how are we being called to act for justice?



## Week 3 Preaching Resources: R.E.S.P.E.C.T. the Stranger

### Scripture Passage:

Deuteronomy 10:14-22 (focus verses: 10:17-19)

### Focus Statement:

Last week we talked about listening and then being compelled to act. As followers of God, our action must always be based on God's view of the stranger and how God calls us to love them.

### ME:

Have you ever felt like a stranger – out of place, felt like you didn't "fit," felt different from others around you, or experienced a deep need? In these moments, how have you experienced God's unconditional love and justice?

### WE:

Tell a story about a time when your church community responded with love towards someone new in town who was of another culture or from another country (i.e., listened to their story, helped them become acquainted with the church and wider community). How did this experience change your church? How was the other person changed by your act of love? If you don't have such a story to share, look for examples in the local news.

### GOD:

The Bible is clear: as children made in God's image, we are to treat the foreigner/immigrant with empathy, compassion, justice, and inclusion.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 is not an isolated passage; it is part of a major theme throughout the Bible starting in Genesis 1 and continuing through Revelation. Time and again throughout scripture God blesses those who treat the stranger with kindness, and curses those who do not. See, for example, Psalm 146:9; Jeremiah 7:5-7; Ezekiel 22:6-8, 22:29; Malachi 3:5, etc.

If you choose to read the whole passage, you may want to address the seeming contradiction: verses 14-16 start by saying God has chosen the Israelites and their descendants alone and for them to circumcise themselves as a sign of being set apart by God. Many Christians are uncomfortable with this kind of language, asking, doesn't God love everyone? Or, alternatively, they use this to justify an "us" versus "them", "chosen" versus "unchosen" mentality. The rest of the passage says God is "not partial" and brings justice and love for all. Christians might think, "That's more like it!" But God does elect the Israelites to be God's chosen people. This does not mean God does not love everyone else or that we can justify division. Rather, God *chooses* the Israelites to be the people that reveal the character of God to the



whole world and show the world what it's like to live in covenant-faithfulness. That is precisely why they must show God's love to the stranger.

Deut. 10:14-22 both illustrates the foundation of God's law and nature - unconditional love and justice- and also models specific ways to treat the foreigner: with dignity, with empathy, without partiality, and by advocating on their behalf.

In the New Testament this theme is given even greater emphasis through Jesus' call to welcome the stranger, his ministry outside the borders of Palestine, and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. As God enters into human life in Jesus, God includes more and more people in the work of showing the world who God is. This does not erase the special covenant God has with the Jewish people; it is evidence of it – the world increasingly comes to know the God of Israel. As people who have been incorporated into the "new covenant" of Jesus' blood, we too are called to treat the stranger with dignity, empathy, impartiality, and by advocating on their behalf.

#### YOU:

The core motivation in this passage is empathy "...for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Are there any stories from your own family's history that might help you relate to the new immigrants among us? Prof. Arthur Sutherland points out the centrality of hospitality to God's plan. Since God will always be a stranger to us, receiving God is receiving a stranger, someone different from us (*I was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality*, pg. 206). Receiving God, therefore, is an act of faith and so is receiving others.

#### WE:

Over time, how welcoming has your church been to the stranger? If your neighborhood's demographic has changed, does your congregation reflect that change in its make-up. If not, why? How can this passage inspire your church to become more welcoming to the stranger?



## Week 4 Preaching Resources: Diverse People, One Vision

### Scripture Passage:

Revelation 7:9-17

### Focus Statement:

We cannot truly listen to, act, or love all of God's children if we do not also affirm how God sees all of us. And without affirming one another in all our fullness, God cannot be fully revealed and known to us.

### ME:

Tell a story about a time when being with persons who were different from you allowed you to experience and know God in a deeper way.

### WE:

It is easy to get comfortable with our own way of worshipping, experiences of God, and knowing God in a narrow way. This only gives us a limited view of who God is. Tell a story about a time when your church community affirmed something new (ministry, worship practice, etc.) and how it revealed a fuller picture of God *or* about a time when you wanted to affirm something new and didn't know how but still took steps to into the unknown.

### GOD:

Rev.7:9-10 specifically highlights that the multitude represented every nation, every tribe, people, and language standing before the throne of God proclaiming the same message, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" This diversity was praised and affirmed by the angels and elders that were gathered in verses 11-12.

Verses 13 and 14 identify those in the multitude as persons who have gone through the great ordeal. The common experience that binds all these different people together is one of both salvation and suffering. They have all been through "the ordeal" - persecuted for the sake of God. They are not identified/identifiable by being blessed over against others. However, they are all recipients of God's promise of liberation for the future. Thus, they waved palm branches, a sign of their victory in Christ.

Furthermore, verse 14 states, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb." This is not a physical or literal whiteness (they have been washed in blood, after all), but rather represents the oneness and purity of all. White robes signify the one baptism that



incorporates all into the community of Christ. True and ultimate redemption in Jesus gathers all people from everywhere, every language. It is inclusive, rather than exclusive. This is foretold by the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 10:8). This passage also points to Acts 2 and the beginning of the church when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all the people and they began to “speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability” (Acts 2:4). It was an inclusive community of all God’s children.

Salvation does not belong to any particular group or what they do to maintain their group identity. Salvation belongs to God and God alone, and all are recipients of God’s grace. Because of this, we are also all givers of God’s grace. Our *sameness* does not unite the community of God, but unity is based on the love of God in Christ alone. For this reason, our differences do not need to be erased, but can be celebrated.

### YOU:

What are the things that stop you from taking the steps towards embracing the new and unknown? How can you support others in their desire to do so? Remember that salvation is not a destination but a journey with God and others. Even John, when asked the question by the elder (verses 13-14), said, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” God gives us grace as we journey – especially to say, “I don’t know,” or “Let’s see,” as we embrace the new and unknown.

### WE:

How can you encourage your church community to celebrate your unity in Christ by honoring the differences (i.e., different people, different languages, different ways of doing ministry, etc.) within your church and wider community?

How would doing so illuminate a fuller picture of God, as well as God in each other? In what ways do you lean on sameness to feel like a community? How can that shift to a celebration of difference in unity?