

MARCH 5

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. —Mark 10:46-52

In her book, *Radical Welcome*, the Rev. Stephanie Spellers talks about three types of welcome that strangers can experience when they come into our churches:

Inviting—"You are welcome to come in and be just like the rest of us."

Inclusion—"You are welcome to come in and be yourself, but off on the margins where you will never influence our dominant culture."

Radical Welcome—"You are welcome to come in and be yourself, and we will be changed by you."

Our model in Christ is radical welcome. The Bartimaeus story is Jesus showing us how to welcome the stranger. Over

his disciples' objections, Jesus brings Bartimaeus right into the center of the community, removes all the barriers between Bartimaeus and the community, and at the end Bartimaeus is "one of them" . . . and the disciples are changed (we hope) by the experience.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us the stranger *is* him. That means any other welcome but radical welcome is idolatry—either through demanding Christ be in our own image or intentionally keeping Christ out of the center of our lives.

What kind of welcome do you practice?

—MIKE KINMAN