

Flaws and calls and healing

By [Phyllis Kersten](#)

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A friend heard I was writing about blind Bartimaeus and asked me a question: “Where do call and healing meet? How do they intersect?” Since I didn’t really know the answer, I preferred to think of her question as rhetorical.

It’s a good question, and I’ve been thinking a lot about it lately. The recent death of Senator Ted Kennedy and the [celebration](#) of his life by those who knew him well—family, colleagues, clergy, political observers—broadened the question for me to include *flaws* along with calls and healing.

Kennedy lived a tragic and flawed existence. The public and private expectations and burdens placed on him by the deaths of his three older brothers were immense. If that wasn’t enough, he was seriously injured in a plane crash where two others died, with chronic back pain as the residue of his survival. The lives of two of his three children were scarred by cancer. And then there were his indisputable failings of character: his expulsion from Harvard for cheating, Mary Jo Kopechne’s death in Chappaquiddick, a failed marriage and tales of alcoholic escapades with his young nephews.

Friends and colleagues spoke of Kennedy’s second wife Vickie as “saving” his life. But I believe there was more to his salvation and transformation than Vickie, as important as her love for him must have been. There is a mysterious element to any healing. But I think Kennedy’s faith and relationship to mother church also healed him: the love of God and the forgiveness of his sins enabled him to fulfill his calling and vocation in a marvelous way.

In the legislation he proposed and guided through Congress, in the help he offered Massachusetts citizens who lost loved ones on 9/11 and in the shepherding of his own family, Kennedy provided for widows and orphans in their distress. In his unwillingness to demonize opponents and in the knack he had for friendships, he provided a model for working together for the common good in government—an

example needed more than ever today.

Throughout Mark's Gospel, and especially in the [several chapters](#) immediately preceding the story of Bartimaeus, Jesus' 12 disciples are pictured as flawed individuals—failing time after time to see, to hear, to understand Christ's mission and their role in it, their calling to accompany him on his journey to the cross and to pick up their own cross and follow him. Where do flaw and healing and call meet? It is only in the aftermath of Jesus' death and resurrection, when Jesus breathes his own breath on the 11, pronounces peace on them and forgiveness for all their flaws, that his first disciples can truly begin to fulfill their calling.

This Sunday's second reading is from Hebrews. Christ is portrayed there as our great high priest, "able for all time to save those who approach God through him" since he "lives to make intercession for them." This too is part of the mystery of where flaw and call and healing meet. This is how it can come to be that Jesus' first disciples and we, flawed as we are, can join Bartimaeus and Ted Kennedy in that community to which they belong: what Mark I. Wegener [describes](#) as "people who are not too proud to ask for mercy, people who are 'saved by faith,' people who follow Jesus on the way to the cross."

I have another question for you. In the story of Bartimaeus, the very people who first try to silence him later pass along—mediate—Jesus' call to him. How do we either silence or mediate Christ's healing and calling of people today?