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Liturgy of the Word, Mark 10:46-52, Twenty Second Sunday After Pentecost, 24th October
2021

Mark 10:46-52

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The Collect

Merciful Lord,
you heard the cry of the blind beggar
when others would have silenced him;
give us courage to be persistent in prayer,
to ask plainly what we need
and to follow where you lead;
for you live and reign with the Father

and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and
ever. Amen

Readings

Job 42:1-6, 10-17
Psalm 34:1-8, (19-22)
Hebrews 7:23-28
Mark 10:46-52

Liturgy of the Word: Where Vision is Lost Faith is Found

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).

This well-known story on the healing of Bartimaeus brings to an end a key section of Jesus’ ministry in the gospel of Mark that began in Mark 8:22, with the healing of another blind man, followed by Peter’s confession in Mark 8:27-33, at Caesarea Philippi, as Jesus confronted his disciples on his identity, leading to Peter’s declaration of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. It is the last repository of grace before Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, in the chapter that follows, Mark 11:1, bringing to fulfilment Jesus’ journey toward the cross. So, the present story, apart from being a repository of divine grace, focuses on revealing Jesus’ identity and mission. Contrary to the sons of Zebedee, blind Bartimaeus takes part in the narrative as one who truly ‘sees’ Jesus despite his blindness. So, the story has a meaning that goes far beyond the portrayal of a simple miracle story, it is a story that depicts what honest faith can do for those who really see Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Once again, we are introduced to a story of faith and the power of divine grace. Here, the power of grace has the propensity of restoring life to those at the margin of society, it may restore hope to those who desperately languish on the wayside. The power of faith has the ability to transform a story of

desperation into a wellspring of grace. God's grace is sufficient. The story shows that, where faith is possible, God's grace can even transform an ordinary beggar into a committed disciple of Christ. As we follow the story of Bartimaeus, we can only say that 'where vision is lost faith is found.' As Jesus always insisted as he taught his disciples, it is in losing life that life is found. The story tells of the challenges and obstacles that faith may take before it can come to fruition. It takes a story of despair to reveal God's glory, a story of suffering to bring a story of joy, a story of discouragement to bring a story of encouragement. Above all, it takes an ordinary beggar to become a disciple in order to inspire and strengthen our own faith. Bartimaeus perseveres, and is healed. And when he has received his sight, he follows Jesus on the way. So Bartimaeus is a model of discipleship to those who find it hard to follow Christ amidst countless challenges, obstacles, and adversities.

Faith as Insight

One of the practical implications when Bartimaeus regains his sight is to follow Jesus. We need insight in order to follow. Jesus' is encouraging and life restoring. When the blind was called, he threw off his cloaks and sprang to Jesus. We have to try to let it go in order to follow Jesus, we must set aside all that which hinders us from coming to Jesus. Bartimaeus truly exemplifies the disciple who sees where the way ahead leads and yet follows and believes Jesus. We can see but without insight. Where James and John ask for positions in the realm of glory, Bartimaeus asks for insight. The event takes place in Jericho on Jesus' way to Jerusalem. Jericho holds a very special place not only in Mark's gospel but also in Jesus' ministry. Jericho will become the last village that receives Jesus' blessings, before Jesus faces his journey towards the city of Jerusalem, where his triumphant entry will culminate with the events that will lead him to the cross. But, despite its historical significance as recorded in Biblical Israel, Jericho also reminds us of the need for reconciliation and peace, not only in the fellowship of Christ, but also in the entire Middle East, more specifically on the need for lasting peace between Israel and Palestine. This is because modern Jericho, as part of the Palestinian territory, in the West Bank, is only a few miles away from Jerusalem. So, Jericho constitutes the last stop in Jesus' ministry, before Jesus enters Jerusalem, but also the beginning of a lasting conflict. By leaving Jericho, Jesus not only leaves a city but also enters Jerusalem to inaugurate the last chapter of his ministry on earth. In the very next passage, we find Jesus entering Jerusalem and starting the chain of events that will end up at the cross.

Faith can make us well

Faith can make us well. It is Jesus who heals, and faith that receives that healing. And so, it is, or can be, for those who hear this story and this good news. Faith can make us well. Faith can open our ears. even raise us from death. This is the power of the promise wherein faith and forgiveness, faith and wellness, meet; this is the power of Jesus' word for salvation. And it is to this meeting of faith and fullness of life that we ought to be preaching. In Mark, Bartimaeus is not the first person seeking a miracle who approaches Jesus in faith, but he is the only one who winds up following him, presumably straight into Jerusalem and into his confrontation with the temple-based aristocracy. After ten chapters full of so much secrecy, confusion, and misapprehension, Bartimaeus shows Mark's readers that faith in Jesus remains possible and potent. Without Bartimaeus, and others in Mark like him who tenaciously cling to Jesus out of faith born from their urgent needs, this Gospel would offer little assurance that *anyone* could have the spiritual insight to perceive the mysterious ways of God in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Without Christ, people like Bartimaeus are not people, but also without people like Bartimaeus gospel will be no gospel.

We cannot follow Christ if we find it hard to let it go of the things we dearly cherish. When Jesus poses the very same question to Bartimaeus that was posed to the sons of Zebedee (Mark 10:36), “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus’ response is a simple request in faith voiced with the sure confidence that Christ would bring it to fruition: “My teacher, let me see again.” In doing so, Bartimaeus declares resolutely and that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah who can bring the wholeness and deliverance that the needy seek. In this confidence and simplicity, what Bartimaeus says is fully consistent with the expressions of faith others have made in Mark concerning Jesus. As we consider Bartimaeus interaction with Jesus, what Jesus asked to James and John, we note that Bartimaeus seeks no special privileges. Bartimaeus’ reply, reiterates that Jesus has not come to bestow power and honour but to open eyes to the spiritual, social, and material realities made possible when God reigns. When it comes to understanding what Jesus has come to do, the disciples James and John are more “blind” than Bartimaeus.

We are all together in this journey, the characters who make up Mark’s gospel represent humanity at its core and challenges that make and shape our humanity. Mark’s narrative compels us to consider the various roles characters play in the scene, and also the various situations in and around our congregational and communal life: Bartimaeus with his needs and prophetic insights, Jesus with his compassion and grace, the crowd with its determination to keep Bartimaeus both blind and invisible, and others with the opportunity to guide him to Jesus with the hopeful words, “Take courage; get up; he is calling you!” The core of the Christian gospel is reassurance, so ministry is about encouragement, is about encouraging each other in the fellowship of faith. Most of us have come to know Jesus not from our own ability and effort, but from people who have had the initiative to lead us to Christ.

Amen