

Reformation Sunday October 27 2024

Mark 10:46-52

Bartimaeus sits outside the walls of Jericho. The city at the bottom of the long climb up to Jerusalem- over 3,500 feet of elevation change. That moment where you really would begin to go "up to Jerusalem" as the saying goes. He sits, Mark says, by the roadside. But you could also say that he sits beside the Way.

The early followers of Jesus were known as people of the Way. It referred not to a particular road, like State Street or Highway 30. Instead, it referred to the way of living that was following after Jesus.

Beside that Way sits Bartimaeus, a now blind man who must beg for a living. He hears the commotion and asks who it is.

Learning it's that Jesus fellow from Galilee, the one who had been stirring up trouble even as he had attracted much attention for his healings and teaching, Bartimaeus cries out. "Son of David, Mercy me!" It is some mix of plea and demand. Mercy me!

Jesus, on hearing the commotion calls the man to him. What do you want me to do for you? "Rabbi, teacher, let me see again." Jesus' response. "Go, your faith has made you well." And

immediately Bartimaeus could see again and... follows Jesus on the way.

Bartimaeus calls Jesus both Son of David (a term for the Messiah) a figure of great power in the Jewish imagination. But he also calls him Rabbi, teacher. Certainly, a figure to respect, but one who is not infused with all the "importance" of the Messiah. One in whose footsteps you follow. In Jesus, Bartimaeus finds both savior and teacher.

Bartimaeus knows what he needs. He needs to see... again. To leave behind the blindness that has overtaken him. And it is faith, trust in Jesus, that restores that sight. Trust that he will make him see again, enough to leave behind his only possession. Trust enough to spring forward into the darkness towards his voice. And then, when Bartimaeus can see- he follows Jesus on the Way.

Amazing Grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

Martin Luther, over 500 years ago, started a re-forming of the church. Because in his reading of scripture Luther found that the church was blind. That while it had once seen and followed the Way of Jesus, in the intervening years the church had lost its

vision. It had been blinded by its privilege. It had been blinded by the reign of the world. Losing sight of the Way of Jesus, the reign of heaven.

Martin Luther, through his own clearing of his vision, called out to the church. So that they too might come to realize their blindness and follow Jesus on the Way.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, the call of Jesus is “follow me.” A call that pulls us into motion and puts us on the path right behind Jesus. That puts us on the Way with him. A Way that was not primarily a doctrinal system, esoteric beliefs, or even the promise of eternal salvation. Rather, it was a way of life in the present. It is living in the reign of God...now. Trusting that living this way brought a life fuller and more abundant than any other.

By enacting Jesus’ teachings, Christianity changed and improved the lives of those who followed him and their communities. The early Christian writer Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) put it this way, *“We who formerly . . . valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to everyone in need; we who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the*

coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies”

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Teacher, let me see again.

These might as well be our words. When we gather together each week around Word and Sacrament we begin with a cry to Jesus- mercy us! It is an acknowledgment that we have become blind to the Way. That we have sinned and hurt ourselves, our neighbors and our relationship with God. Mercy us! It is both a demand and a statement of faith. A trust that Jesus does indeed love us first and foremost.

And we hear the call of Jesus to come near, don't we. A call that can come from friends and family. Come and see. Come and worship. Come and hear.

And then, we sit at the feet of Jesus and submit our simple request. Teacher, let me see again. Wipe away the blindness of this world. Remove the images of power, wealth, prestige that have clouded our vision of the Way. Pour again the waters of baptism over me. That it would wash those images from my eyes, so that I might see you clearly again. Jesus, Son of David, Son of God, teacher, savior, friend.

Do this, so that I might see to follow you on the Way. The Way to loving our neighbors and our enemies. The Way to caring for the least of these among us: the hungry, the poor, the sick, those in prison. The Way to a life lived in community with others- where none need worry that they will be without daily bread. That they will lack love or comfort. That they will be alone.

There are three in our midst today who will affirm their baptism. Three who have walked with us over the last 14-15 years of their lives. Who will step into the promises their parents made at baptism and claim them for themselves. Who will promise to strive with us to follow Jesus on the Way. Who will add their voices to ours when we cry out, "Teacher, let me see again."

Friends, Paul writes truth when he says that now, we see dimly, imperfectly, like looking through the wavy glass of old timey windows. Not always blind, per se, but certainly not seeing clearly. For we are imperfect in our striving to follow Jesus on the Way.

To live among fellow believers. To hear God's Word and share in his supper. To proclaim the good news of God in Jesus Christ in all we say and do. To serve others in the same way Jesus served. To strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

We fall short of these goals and sometimes, when we are particularly blinded by the reign of the world, we ignore or contradict them altogether. We fall short and bring dishonor to the one whose name we bear. Living in a way that does not reflect the Way. We are messy and we mess up. We are far from a perfect bunch.

But...

We are a beloved bunch. Claimed by God in the waters of baptism. Claimed as children of God. Loved for who we are, not what we have done.

We are a forgiven bunch. For God sees the depth of our sin. Knows the breadth of our blindness and washes us clean in the waters of baptism. Waters we can bath in each day. To be made new, so that we might better love and serve God and our neighbors.

We are a gifted bunch. Given unique gifts and abilities by the Holy Spirit. Gifts that are for the benefit of the community. Both this one of faith that is St. John and the community that surrounds us.

We are a bunch that knows from experience that life on the Way, life with Jesus is fuller and more abundance than life any other way.

And so we gather each week to cry out to Jesus- mercy us! Help us to see again. Through your Word, through your people, through the waters that remind us of your love for us and that we are yours, through the Meal of bread and wine that is your own flesh and blood given to sustain us in all things.

So that at the end of the day we can hear those same words that Bartimaeus did. Words of command, invitation, promise, and hope.

Go- your faith has made you well.