

MARK AND HEALING

Mark 10:46-52 [MW21-10]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton, Sunday 14 March 2021

Although it's earlyish on a Sunday morning I'd like to invite you to do something

- imagine
imagine you are in that crowd
that large bubbling crowd lining the road out of Jericho

Among this crowd

- are those who were unable to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover
a journey of about 24 kilometres
they line the streets to wish the pilgrims godspeed on their way

Today there would be more than the usual number

- for there are many eager and curious
to catch a glimpse of this audacious young Galilean
who had pitted himself against orthodoxy and tradition
- against the 'religious establishment'

Also among the crowd would be priests and temple assistants

- who resided in Jericho when not on Temple duty
they would be doubly eager to see this rebel
who was about to invade Jerusalem
- there would be many cold and bleak
and hostile eyes in the crowd this day ...

Imagine yourself in the midst of this pressing crowd

- straining to catch a glimpse of this Galilean teacher, healer, miracle worker
straining too perhaps to catch a word or two from this one
- to hear for yourself ...

Also in this crowd, at the northern gate, sits a blind beggar

- on learning that Jesus was about to pass by
he begins to shout, at the top of his voice: Jesus! Son of David! Have pity on me!
- over and over again comes that shout:
Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!
Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!
Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me! ...
- on and on and on he goes
he just won't be silenced

Many, if not most, in this crowd regarded the shouting beggar as an annoyance

- a distraction
something that would delay proceedings
- most in that crowd had probably become quite used to seeing beggars along the roadside
and become quite hardened to the sight

Undeterred, this blind beggar continues his shouting

- and the amazing thing is
Jesus noticed
- Jesus noticed

As we have continually noticed in Mark's gospel

- in one short incident there is more than meets the eye
there's no extraneous detail, placement is important
- themes, lessons, nuances, directions
all surrounding one simple healing incident
- I'll highlight some of these, and we'll see, *SEE*, where it leads us ...

It's interesting that Mark is the only gospel writer to give this blind beggar a name

- Bartimaeus
some scholars think this is important
because the man became part of a local fellowship of Christians

Note also the element of rebuke

- whenever Jesus does or says anything in Mark's gospel
there's always some rebuking going on somewhere!
- in this case the rebuke comes from the crowd
the crowd who give the stock response
the response made by crowds throughout history: "Get out and keep quiet!"

But Bartimaeus keeps shouting

- Jesus! Son of David! Have pity on me!
and we wonder ... has this blind man recognised Jesus as the Messiah?
- certainly he recognised Jesus as the one
from whom he could expect the gracious mercy of God

For Mark, faith and overcoming obstacles to faith, are of supreme importance

- by continuing to resist the crowd's attempts to silence his cries for help
Bartimaeus exhibits great faith in Jesus

Earlier, in chapter 8, verses 22-26, Jesus healed another blind man

- that was a "two step" method involving saliva and touch
here Jesus does not even touch Bartimaeus
- Jesus sends Bartimaeus on his way with the assurance:
"you are healed because of your faith"

However we do see what seems to be present in all Jesus' healings in Mark's gospel

- and that is personal involvement on the part of Jesus
which establishes a relationship
and which also identifies the existence of faith
- faith sufficient to receive the gift of healing from God

For this reason questions of brief conversations

- are frequently an element in Mark's healing narratives:
the crippled man lowered through the roof (2:5-11)
the woman who touched Jesus' clothes (5:30-34)
the Syro-Phoenician woman's faith (7:27-29)
the boy with a demon and the father's faith (9:21-24)

Jesus asks Bartimaeus: "What do you want me to do for you?"

- a question designed to strengthen the man's faith
by encouraging him to express it forthrightly
- in response, Bartimaeus acknowledges Jesus
as the one who can make the blind to see

And – as is often the case with Mark's gospel

- you get the feeling that there's something more here something 'between the lines'
- Mark seems to be suggesting that Bartimaeus was healed precisely because although blind in the physical sense he was better able to see than those with two good eyes
- we get this message because in the incident immediately before this one (10:35-45) Mark has Jesus' disciples fail to really see him as they jockey and manoeuvre for positions at Jesus' right and left hand
- Mark has Jesus ask of his disciples the very same question he asked of Bartimaeus "What do you want?"
- James and John wanted power, and so failed to see Bartimaeus wanted Jesus, so he did see

The story of Bartimaeus and Jesus reaches across the years to us today

- to those who may feel like they're still sitting in the dark crying out

Jesus! Son of David! Have pity on me!

- I begin to clean the house and before I'm half finished the dust is beginning to settle again
- I go on and on, but never seem to get ahead I feel useless and I don't see anything down the road

Jesus! Son of David! Have pity on me!

- I go to work and the system is doing things I don't like I disagree with the methods my opinions don't count, my job is not secure
- I collect my pay and sit by the side of the road but I don't see anything down it

Jesus! Son of David! Have pity on me!

- I spend most of my time in my retirement unit the children don't call very often I'm no longer able to work or contribute
- I feel useless and I don't see anything down the road

Mark seems to have had precisely such people in mind when he left us

- in the story of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar that what brought about his healing might bring about ours too

The first thing that Mark records Bartimaeus doing when he learns Jesus is near

- is call out to him: Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me! and this cry "Have mercy on me"
- is a cry directed to God by the afflicted through out the Psalms (Psalm 4:1; 6:2; 41:4,10; 123:3 for example)

Second, Bartimaeus is rebuked – told to pipe down, quit, give it a rest

- but he pays no attention we can be rebuked harshly, or kiddingly often by well-meaning people
- "forget it", "everybody's doing it", "You're wasting your time" "do you think God cares about you ..."
- we are to persevere and call out all the louder

Third, Bartimaeus is told to come to Jesus

- he hesitates, but finally casts aside his cloak and goes why the hesitation?
consider the significance of Bartimaeus' cloak
- it is his mat, his bed, his warmth, his security blanket
it is his one and only possession
- to let go of it is to let go of all he depended on ...

... and that is exactly Mark's point

- let go of what you think is so critical, so important
risk all to run to Jesus

Once upon a time there was an old man from the lovely island of Crete. He loved his land with a deep intensity, so much so that when he knew he was about to die he had his sons bring him outside and lay him on the ground. As he was about to expire he reached down by his side and clutched some earth in his hands. He died a happy man.

He now appeared before heaven's gates. God, in the guise of an old, white-bearded man, came out to greet him. "Welcome," he said, "you've been a good man. Please come into the joys of heaven." But as the man was about to enter through the pearly gates God said, "Please, you must let the soil go." "Never!" cried the old man, stepping back. "Never!" And so God sadly departed, leaving the old man outside the pearly gates. A few eons went by and God came out again, this time in the guise of an old friend, an old drinking crony. They had a few drinks, told some stories, and then God said, "All right, time to enter heaven, friend. Let's go." And they started for the pearly gates. And once more God requested that the old man let go of his soil, and once more the old man refused.

More eons rolled by. God came out once more, this time in the guise of the old man's delightful and playful granddaughter. "Oh, granddaddy," she said, "you're so wonderful and we all miss you. Please come inside with me." The old man nodded as she helped him up, for by this time he had grown very old indeed and very arthritic. In fact, so arthritic was he that he had to prop up the right hand holding Crete's soil with his left hand. They moved toward the pearly gates, and at this point his strength quite gave out. His gnarled fingers would no longer stay clenched, with the result that the soil sifted out between them until his hand was empty. Empty-handed, he entered heaven. The first thing he saw was his beloved island.

The gaining is in the losing - the healing is in the letting go

- the letting go of firmly held perceptions, comfortable understandings
hopes, plans, things, people

For Mark, disciples – followers of Jesus – overcome obstacles

- moving through amazement and fear, to faith
faith in Jesus which brings healing and wholeness

Some scholars think Mark has placed the healing of a blind man

- as the final event in Jesus' ministry outside Jerusalem
to show the disciples would eventually be healed of their spiritual blindness
- Bartimaeus exhibits faith that forms the basis for healing
faith that points to the success of Jesus' mission
- despite the voices of opposition
and the misunderstanding of those closest to Jesus

Christians throughout history have repeated Bartimaeus' cry for mercy

- a prayer frequently uttered to remind the faithful
that God's mercy is always present
- "Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on us!" [PP Slide]