

Yr. B, Proper 25
October 28, 2018
Preached by the Rev. Furman Buchanan
St. Peter's Episcopal Church
1480 Words

Lessons: Jeremiah 31:7-9
Psalm 126
Hebrews 7:23-28
Mark 10:46-52

The cloak Bartimaeus threw off when he sprang to his feet is an unmistakable clue. You don't need a cloak—or even *want* a cloak—in one of the hottest cities on earth...unless you spend your *nights* on the streets. St. Mark wants us to know that Bartimaeus is homeless. His clothes and his skin are caked in the residue of sweat from the desert sun. Most likely, you would smell Bartimaeus before you saw him—bundled up in a heap of misery on the sandy street with a coin or two nearby tossed from a passerby showing pity.

The good news is that Bartimaeus cannot see *you*. He is a *blind* beggar. You may be able to slip by quietly and escape his notice. You might be able to look the other way and remain undisturbed. If you hold your breath you can even pass through the sphere of his odor unbothered...*unless you follow Jesus*.

If you follow Jesus the word is going to get out. Poor, desperate people know what his name represents. The name of Jesus literally means the power of God's love to heal and save. Even if *followers* of Jesus ignore the poor and shout down the desperate people seeking help—the name of Jesus still stands for compassion 100% of the time.

In March of 1988 I stepped off the bus in hot, dusty Calcutta, India.¹ I needed to find the American Express office, and I wanted to find Mother Theresa and the Missionaries of Charity. There were no Google maps and mobile phones back then, and so I asked people on the street for directions. *Nobody* knew anything about American Express, the most powerful source of wealth and credit in the world. Yet, *everybody* knew the location of Mother Theresa, the most powerful source of the love of Jesus in their city.

We should want our names to be like that. We should want our identities to be so closely bound up in the identity of Jesus that people know unmistakably that we *really do* share his values—and therefore—his power in this world to heal and to save. I like to refer to the Church like the Prayer Book does: as the Body of Christ. And our goal here at St. Peter's is to strengthen *living members* of this Body of Christ who want to seek and serve Him by serving others in healing and loving ways.

Now, let's look back again at Bartimaeus lying on the ground. St. Mark does something strange in telling this story—he repeats the name. Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, is the same thing twice in a row. You see, *Bar* in Aramaic means 'son of.'

And so Mark introduces one last story from Jericho right after James and John make their play for the two special seats of honor—one on the right and one on the left of Jesus' side. And St. Mark does it by introducing us to the blind, begging, smelly, homeless son of Timaeus, son of Timaeus...which translates from the ancient Greek: son of honor, son of honor.

The irony is unmistakable. The two, ultimate insiders—James and John—who got privileged access to Jesus in his most glorious moment of Transfiguration and in other private moments have just been rebuked by Jesus because they were seeking *even more honor*; and then...the ultimate, worthless nobody—this worthless son of honor—gets called up by Jesus and valued for who he is and who he might become.

¹ The traditional Bengali name, Kolkata, was restored in 2001. When I visited in 1988 the commonly used name was Calcutta.

What does Jesus see in people that we don't see? What does Jesus see in the poor, desperate, hungry, hurting and oppressed people in this world that we don't see? Maybe we are the blind ones in this story.

Could we be the sons and daughters of honor—people who enjoy all the benefits of respectability—and yet we are either unable or unwilling to see the value of all people, especially those who are de-valued by others? We have seen clearly this week how tragically short is the distance between devaluing others and destroying others.²

We are so accustomed to overlooking others' needs that we have to *practice* seeing. Two thousand years later, it is still commonplace to bypass the blind, the deaf, people with disabilities, the homeless, and those who are desperate for help. It is still normal to mock and ridicule the poor as ostensibly lazy and irresponsible. It is still normal to see them as always dangerous, and therefore utterly dismissible.

Following Jesus now is just as hard now as it was back then. Embracing the values and example of Jesus now is just as hard as it was then. This is why we must 'practice' our faith. This is why St. Peter's Outreach Advocates and other volunteers devote so much time, talent, and energy into developing a wide range of opportunities for you to practice seeing...and seeking and serving Christ in others. We all know it is hard to see and seek and serve Christ, so we practice it.

There is a lot to be said for the gift of faith—freely bestowed like a talent for music or sports or business or dancing or science or math or anything else. The clearest way to show your gratitude for your talent is to practice it, develop it, strengthen it, to become the best you can be. Likewise, the clearest way to show your gratitude for your faith is to practice it, develop it, strengthen it, and become the best you can be.

I know not everybody is physically or emotionally capable to do everything. And this is why our blue sheet is so long every Sunday. Our goal is to have a menu of options so broad that every person on any given Sunday can find at least one thing to do in Jesus name. There are ways to serve beyond our community. There are ways to share compassion within our community. There are opportunities to learn and grow. There are always opportunities to give some of your time, talent, and money to the glory of God as we seek and serve others in Jesus' name.

We aim to be a place where faith gets practiced by people who are grateful to be followers of Jesus because we *know* it is hard to live up to his example. By the way, if you don't see something that fits your abilities or your schedule, please speak to one of your vestry members and offer your suggestions. We are not afraid to try new things!

That dirty, smelly homeless man stood face to face with Jesus. Like us, he could not see Jesus physically, but he knew he was there...he knew the power of God's love to heal and save was right there before him. And then Jesus asked the question that is sharper than any two-edged sword: What do you want me to do for you?

Listen once more *with Bartimaeus* to the question Jesus is asking us: What do you want me to do for you?

How might you be forgiven or healed or renewed to become a more faithful follower of Jesus? What could we ask Jesus to do for us in order for us to do the kinds of compassionate things that glorify his name in our time and place? Maybe we should pray, like Bartimaeus, for him to let us see again!

² This week in the life of our nation we suffered the mass murder of eleven Jews praying in their synagogue by an anti-Semitic murderer; the assassination of two black persons at a grocery store by a racist; and the mailing of 13 pipe bombs to two former Presidents, a host of Democratic elected representatives, appointed public servants, and others as well as an office at CNN.

In the fog of fear, anxiety, and callousness, let us pray to see again! In the darkness of devaluation, hatred, and violence against people, let us pray to see again! In a time woefully lacking in Christ-like examples of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and love; let us pray to see again!

And let us use our renewed vision to see ourselves as sons and daughters of honor, adopted into the family of God through Holy Baptism.

In baptism we were accepted in order to accept others in Jesus' name. In baptism we were forgiven in order to forgive others in Jesus' name. We were healed in order to offer healing to others in Jesus' name. And we were loved in order to love others in Jesus' name. Like Bartimaeus, we were valued in order to become more valuable. Like Bartimaeus, we received the power of God to live most fully into our identity—as sons and daughters of honor!

Jesus, in his normal counter-cultural manner, gives all the credit to someone else. Jesus credits the miracle to the smelly, homeless, and worthless beggar. “*Your faith* has made you well.” he said.

May it also be true for us. May the gift of *our faith*—practiced, developed, and strengthened—make *us* well—well enough to stand up with Jesus...well enough to bless him not only in our worship and prayer, but also in our service to others...well enough to follow him on the way...the way of love.

Amen.