

Message for Sunday, October 28, 2018

Based on Mark 10: 46-52

Offered by: Rev. Liz Bowyer

For: the people at Trinity United, Vernon, B.C.

I love this story that rounds out the tenth chapter of gospel according to Mark.

Here, this morning, we find ourselves located with Jesus and his followers well on their way.

Almost at their destination, Jerusalem, we encounter them at Jericho, just 20 miles to the northeast.

Here at Jericho, they take a brief pause to sustain themselves for the last leg of this important journey.

It's been a journey of many encounters along the way, a journey of some struggle for those committed to the path, but also still growing in their faith as they come to more clearly understand the costs of discipleship.

Here, at Jericho, where we might have imagined them pausing for a bathroom break or a snack or a chance to briefly recoup, here where they were not expecting a 'come to Jesus moment', several important things happen.

Here at the tail end of the tenth chapter of Mark's gospel, the thronging crowds and the disciples encounter a new teacher.

This new teacher turns out to be a blind beggar, a nobody, a person of no fixed address, no holder of possessions or power, someone easily passed by who has nothing more than a simple cloak to protect him from the elements.

Even so, the blind beggar has a name which is something that distinguishes him from others Jesus and the disciples have encountered in need of healing along the way.

Bartimaeus, or son of Timaeus, not only has a name which has some history to it, he also has ears to hear and a voice to speak.

Here in this morning's text he uses both.

Though physically blind, Bartimaeus also has the capacity to recognize Jesus in a way that no one else to date has done.

At first, the thronging crowd and the disciples try to quell Bartimaeus' plaintive efforts to connect with Jesus.

Their attempts at shushing Bartimaeus up, however, actually work against them.

In fact, the more they try to shush Bartimaeus up, the more fervently he calls out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

In no time at all, Jesus begins to notice this noisy nobody, this blind beggar, this one that would certainly rank among the last and the least by anyone's definition.

This, in and of itself is not so surprising, but what happens next **is** (surprising).

The passage tells us that Jesus 'stands still'. (NSRV p. 1939).

The Jesus we meet in Mark's gospel, has long since set his face towards his destiny at Jerusalem and is operating at a breakneck pace. Rarely does he stand still.

Here, being named Son of David by a blind man begging at the side of the road, here Jesus stands still.

Rather than commenting on this title or even going to the person in need of healing as he has done in other places in Mark's gospel, Jesus advises his disciples to call the man over.

And indeed, they do.

The blind man, in his excitement, throws off his cloak, likely his only possession, and springs forward.

What makes this healing story a little different than others we might have heard is that Jesus directs those closest to him, those ones who see themselves as Jesus' protectors, to enter into the hard work of participating *with him* in the man's healing.

Next comes what might seem an obvious question to us as Jesus asks the blind man what he wants.

We might even be inclined to be a little impatient with Jesus.

After all, isn't it obvious what ails the man?

And again, we are reminded of two important things.

The first, is this: God, in Jesus, expects the man to show up to his own healing needs, to his own brokenness.

In this story from Mark's Gospel, God, in Jesus, makes no assumptions about what the man needs.

Discovering what Blind Bartimaeus needs, acknowledging and naming what's needed, and what's broken in Bartimaeus' life is Bartimaeus' work.

Indeed, the story provides us a cautionary tale.

When we call out to God for healing, we can rest in the good news that God will respond, but God will also ask us to clarify our needs; and from there God will bring us to healing and wholeness, to restoration and reconciliation.

Our work as followers in the Way of Jesus is to call out, to wait on God, to acknowledge what ails us, what needs mending, what needs restoring and then, of course, to trust in God's compassionate ways.

Indeed, in this story, Jesus and Blind Bartimaeus together model for us just such a collaborative nature of healing and wholeness swiftly, simply, and beautifully.

Calling Jesus, "My teacher", Bartimaeus acknowledges and names what he needs to be healed. "Let me see again", he implores.

And what does Jesus do? He simply affirms the man's faith.

"Go." He tells him. "Your faith has made you well."

For many in Mark's gospel, those healed do just that, they 'go', they bear witness to what God has done for them through Jesus, and their lives and all with whom they share the good news are forever changed.

Not so Bartimaeus. He signs on with the other followers in the Way, the very ones who are still struggling, still learning what the costs of discipleship will entail.

The formerly blind noisy nobody sitting at the side of the road somewhere along the way, has been healed of both a physical and spiritual blindness.

But he has also become a teacher and co-creator actively committed to the building of God's vision of Shalom.

May this story from Mark's gospel continue to inform our resistance to call out for spiritual help when spiritual help is needed.

May this story encourage us to continue to nibble away at our need to maintain blinkered thinking or the status quo.

May it challenge us when we want to 'shush' up those whose voices we most fear.

Finally, may this morning's story from Mark's gospel help us find courage to be open-open to God's relentless invitation to sign on in new and innovative ways to be about the collaborative work of engaging with a living, loving God; one who desperately needs us to show up and to walk the talk of healing and wholeness.

For the sake of all those lost in our deeply broken and ailing world, my fondest prayer is that it may be so.

Amen

*The impetus from this reflection comes from a variety of resources including:

- YouTube of a sermon attributed to the Rev. Jennifer Butler entitled "On the Way to Spiritual Wholeness"
- "In the Meantime, Pentecost 23B: Bartimaeus and the Reformation:", by David Lose, received by e-mail October 25, 2018