

Proper 25
Year B 2021
Mark 10:46-52

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

In today's gospel, we find Jesus and the disciples in Jericho just about to enter Jerusalem.

This is the last gospel from Mark in our lectionary cycle before Jesus enters Jerusalem.

Today's gospel chronicles the last events of His journey among the outcasts before an in person challenge to the power structures of Jerusalem.

It's important to know that Jericho was kind of the east Colfax of it's day.

Home to many impoverished and disenfranchised.

Many of these individuals attempted to support themselves by means of begging from the pilgrims on their way into Jerusalem for the religious festivals.

This was not happenstance.

The downtrodden population knew that the pilgrims would have sufficient means in order to embark on a pilgrimage and attend the religious festivals in Jerusalem.

And as they were on their way to a most significant festival – Passover – they might be inclined to part with some of their fortune.

This is where Mark introduces us to Bartimaeus.

Son of Timaeus.

Naming Bartimaeus' lineage is not just happenstance for Mark.

He is making the point that Bartimaeus was born into a family.

A family which has no doubt suffered shame as a result of his blindness.

Bartimaeus in Hebrew could mean “son of the unclean.”

Unable to see and begging for money,
Bartimaeus represents the poorest among the poor.

Blind, sitting on his cloak by the side of the road
calling out to the travelers for help, for mercy, so that he might eat.

So that he might survive.

When someone in the crowd tells Bartimaeus
that Jesus of Nazareth is passing, he begins shouting:

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

The crowd around Bartimaeus reacts by ordering him to be quiet.

To know his place - begging at the side of the road on his cloak.

But Bartimaeus refuses to be silenced and shouts even louder:

“Son of David, have mercy on me!”

The title Bartimaeus uses, *Son of David*, appears only here in Mark.

Jesus stops.

Bartimaeus has perceived something about Jesus that no other has throughout the gospel of Mark.

Clearly, Jesus could have walked over to Bartimaeus to talk with him.

Instead, He tells the crowd to bring Bartimaeus to Him.

So now some of those who sought to obstruct the beggar assist in Jesus' ministry to him.

Some, at least, in the crowd, encourage Bartimaeus saying: "Take heart; get up; he's calling you!"

And here Mark adds one more detail: Bartimaeus tosses aside his cloak.

Obviously, Bartimaeus expects to regain his sight because logic tells us a blind beggar would never deliberately throw away their most prized possession.

He throws away the sole element of livelihood.

You see, beggars spread their cloaks to receive alms so they could more easily collect them.

Essentially, today's equivalent of the plastic cup.

For individuals living in poverty at that time, the cloak was an essential item that provided warmth during hostile weather and served to allow them to sleep at night or to throw it in front of them to collect money.

It seems clear then, that Bartimaeus obviously expects a change in his status.

When Bartimaeus reaches Jesus, Jesus asks:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

Without hesitation, Bartimaeus states:

“My teacher, let me see again.”

Bartimaeus has enough faith to throw away his most valuable possession and ask without embarrassment or regret for that which will allow him to regain his place in society.

Let me see again.

Jesus, recognizing the man’s faith, restores his sight.

As with the hemorrhaging woman, those who risk everything through their belief in Jesus are returned to wholeness.

Just last week, we heard the encounter between Jesus, James and John.

Jesus asked the same question of James and John:

“What do you want me to do for you?”

Similarly, in a previous gospel this month, Jesus is approached by the rich man who is also seeking a recognition of his power and status from Jesus.

But Jesus was and is not about enhancing power, riches or status at the expense of the outcasts, the forgotten, the reviled.

Faith does not come easily to people in Mark.

Remember the paralyzed man who was carried by his friends to Jesus and lowered through the roof.

Remember again the hemorrhaging woman, the leader whose daughter is found dead; and the father who brings to Jesus his son suffering from seizures.

Just so for Bartimeaus.

Some in the crowd rebuke Bartimaeus, when he cries out to Jesus, demanding he be silent.

This reminds us that blind beggars dwell near the bottom rung of social privilege in ancient (and contemporary) society.

Do people shout Bartimaeus down because they think he deserves to be who he is?

Probably.

Do they put their own needs before his?

Perhaps.

In their ignorance about Jesus,
the focus of His message,
and His concern for blind beggars,
the crowd's reprimand of Bartimaeus
threatens to limit the range within which
Jesus might dispense his compassion and grace.

But, Bartimaeus knows better.

And so he yells "even more loudly"
until his words penetrate Jesus' ears.

Jesus recognizes what drives Bartimaeus.

Jesus names *faith* as what compels Bartimaeus to shout.

I think many of us define faith
as church attendance, prayer time,
knowing and reciting the creeds.

But Jesus shows us,
through his encounter with Bartimaeus,
and others in the Markan gospel,
that faith is not about reciting the correct confession
or subscribing to certain dogmas.

It is Bartimaeus' unrelenting conviction that Jesus has the power to change his conditions that attracts Jesus.

Bartimaeus seeks no special privileges.

He understands that Jesus has not come to bestow power and honor but to open eyes to the new spiritual, social, and material realities made possible when God reigns.

Remember, there are at least some in the crowd who have recognized the moment.

Have recognized the opportunity at hand when they guided Bartimaeus to Jesus with the hopeful words,

“Take courage; get up; he’s calling you!”

So now, what does this all mean for me, you might be asking.

I don’t see myself in this gospel.

Or, what does this have to do with all of us, as the community of St. Andrew’s.

In the words of Ched Myers from *Binding the Strong Man*:

*It is only when we struggle
against the internal demons
that render us deaf and mute
to the needs of the outcast
that we truly become disciples.*

Are we able to see ourselves as disciples in this day and age?

Where is the way we are to follow?

There is no doubt that there are
as many impoverished and disenfranchised
as there were in the Jesus' time.

We only need to look across the street,
down the block, or at every intersection we cross on a daily basis.

What if we were to begin to change our thinking
to realize that it is not our creeds,
our liturgy, our beautifully appointed surroundings
that are the basis of our faith?

What if we were to believe that
it is not just an act of courage,
but also of faith,
to give what we can?

To speak and act against injustice.

To guide those in need to
the resources that can change their condition for the better.

What if we lived our faith?

What if we truly believe
that directing our intention and actions
to the benefit of those who are
so desperately in need *is* faith?

I believe the answer lies in Mark's gospel.

Mark shows us that time and time again
when people respond to the benefit of the needy,
no matter how difficult that is,
there is a positive outcome.

To act knowing that, no matter the difficulty,
that our actions on behalf of the outcast,
the poor, the neglected and the disenfranchised,
are the personification of our faith in Jesus.

When we are able to step up and step out,
engaging in actions for the benefit of others,
that is when we are showing the world
the nature of our faith.

So I say to you, to me, to the community of St. Andrew's:

“Take courage; get up; He's calling us!”