

The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
October 27, 2024
Jeremiah 31:7-9, Psalm 126, Hebrews 7:23-26,
Mark 10:46-52

What do you want me to do for you?

Over the past few weeks as we have journeyed through the Gospel of Mark, we have had stories of healing interspersed with stories about how the disciples keep getting it wrong about what Jesus' mission is, and their part in it. Jesus asked the disciples who they believed he was, and Peter answered, the Messiah, and yet, when he and the others learned of his suffering and death, they drew back. As Jesus continues on the journey to Jerusalem, he keeps reminding them of the events that will transpire at the end of his life, and they don't want to hear about it. Instead, they are more interested in who is the greatest and who will sit at his right hand! In today's story, we have what seems like a typical healing, a man is blind, and Jesus restores his sight. But there is a combination of events here that makes it different.

Here, at the time of this healing, Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem to undergo suffering and death, and encounters the man along the way. One has the feeling from reading this story, that the man Bartimaeus, has

been blind for some time, and it is his custom to sit on the side of that particular stretch of road to beg. The people of Jericho and the crowds probably saw him as a nuisance. On this day, when he heard Jesus was passing by, he cried out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” They probably found it annoying, and told him to shut up. And the more they told him to be quiet, the more earnest and urgent his cries became, “Son of David, have mercy on me, Son of David, have mercy on me! The blind man is calling Jesus by his messianic title. Perhaps another reason the crowd wants him to stop his cries is that they’re afraid his drawing attention to Jesus as the messiah will stir up political trouble with the oppressive Roman regime.

At any rate, Bartimaeus is determined. He isn’t going to stop crying out to get Jesus’ attention. After all these years of suffering, reduced to begging by the side of the road, he isn’t waiting any longer. Jesus stops and says, “Call him here.” Then when the people gathered there say, “All right already, cheer up! Get up, he is calling you, he springs up, flings aside his cloak and goes to Jesus. Notice Jesus doesn’t lay hands on him, or touch his eyes, or put mud on them, as we have

seen him do in other healings. He just asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man eagerly answers, “My teacher, let me see again! And Jesus says, as he said to the woman with the flow of blood, to the leper in the Gospel of Matthew, to the Syrophenician woman, “Go, your faith has made you well.” Go forth to love and serve. And the blind man was healed, and he began to follow Jesus.

There are several things to notice about this story. First, as mentioned before, Jesus is not far from Jerusalem. In a sense, Bartimaeus’ declaration that Jesus is the Son of David serves as the announcement of the transition to the final act of the drama, where Jesus, the Messiah, the anointed one will be betrayed, beaten, scourged, and crucified for the redeeming of the world, as they believed it had been prophesied in the Scripture. This story is placed right before the triumphant Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem. The other thing to notice is the contrast between the faith of this man, his expression of his honest need, as opposed to the lack of faith of the disciples. Throughout the gospels, there are many occasions where they don’t really see Jesus as he is. They have moments when they glimpse it, but then turn away

when he talks about suffering and death. He feeds the multitudes on the hillside, yet they don't understand about the loaves. He travels in the boat with them on perilous seas and calms the storm, yet when he walks on the sea to them, they are still terrified. Bartimaeus, on the other hand, deep in his heart, in his very bones, knows that Jesus will restore his sight and heal him. He comes boldly in faith and is healed.

Also, notice how Jesus asks the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you." Instead of letting Jesus ask them that, the disciples, in the story from last week's Gospel, turn it around and say to Jesus "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And when he asks what that is, they tell him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand, and one at your left, in your glory." What they are asking has to do with power, and importance, and influence, not longing and faith and service. They are not coming to Jesus in humility and genuine need, but to lift themselves up. The blind man is asking for something, sure, but he is honest, he has a great need, and he humbly asks for mercy as well as for healing. And his transparency and honest faith are honored. At

times, the disciples seem to glimpse what faith in Jesus means, yet they still struggle with the concepts of humility and service.

So today, are we telling Jesus to do whatever it is we are asking him to do? Or are we listening when he says to us, what do you want me to do for you? Do we primarily ask him to make us prosperous, to give us lives of ease and certainty? Or do we come to him in sorrow and repentance, and also in love and gratitude, asking him to make our spirits whole and help us to follow him and serve the world in his name? And know that if we long for healing, whether it be physical, psychological, or spiritual, it is right and good to open our hearts and express our desire to God.

And when he asks, “what do you want me to do for you? Do we really want to be healed? For we have a part in it, too. We need to wholeheartedly want help, and then take the bold step to embark on the journey of healing, of transformation, of fellowship with God and our brothers and sisters. We may say we want healing, but are we ready to let go of our burdens, that though they weigh us down, are familiar and a known quantity? Are we ready to walk the path of adventure, of

trackless desert paths that are also filled with wild beauty, to find love and abundance that are beyond our wildest hopes? I know that in my own life this is still a struggle. Part of me wants to be healed --of a lack of gratitude, of anxiety, of a fear of change. But it's scary, and ironically, sometimes it feels like a sort of death to ask for healing. If I'm healed, I will have to change, I will have to take responsibility for my life, I might encounter pain, or sorrow, and suffering along the way. And yet there is also great grace, abundance, and joy, too, when we follow Jesus on the way of healing and wholeness.

Yesterday, in his address to the Convention, Bishop Austin spoke of walking and working together to build connections, to establish trust where it has been broken in our Diocese, and to build a community not of us and them but we and ours. He talked about doing the courageous work of learning to walk with respect, to empower each other, to truly see each other, and lift each other up. We are a diverse group, and there are times when we will wound each other, and then we ask for forgiveness. He spoke of that amazing day when changed hearts will make it possible for us to even reach out to our enemies in love. This is

the holy work of healing and transformation we are called to, for ourselves and for the world.

Jesus stands before us in love, asking each of us what do we want him to do for us? How will we answer?