

09, October 25, "Jesus Stood Still" Mark 10: 38-46 (Bartimaeus)

Introduction:

- Today's reading is ostensibly the story of healing the blind man, Bartimaeus. But Mark uses it to describe the process of becoming a disciple, a follower of Jesus.
- As we listen to the scripture, notice all the words that speak of discipleship:
 - Jesus tells the crowd to, "CALL the blind man"; being a follower of Jesus begins with a "call".
 - SEEING is in itself a common biblical image for faith, for inner sight;
 - Jesus tells Bart to "GO"- disciples get sent out into the world.
 - And of course nothing could be plainer than the fact that Bart FOLLOWS Jesus on the way- early followers of Jesus were not called Christians, they called themselves "followers in the way".
- There is a poignant juxtaposition of names- Bartimaeus, means "son of nobody" meaning someone who IS a "nobody". Jesus on the other hand is called "Son of David- there couldn't be a higher title given to him- it is a messianic title. The "son of nobody" calls on the "Son of David"
- The man who is nobody recognises that Jesus is the Messiah and he yearns to leave where he is and to follow Jesus.
- Let us listen for the word of God as it comes to us today according to Mark 10: 46- 52

SERMON

Bartimaeus was not always blind. "My teacher, let me see again" he says. He used to be able to see, but something happened to leave him in darkness, abandoned on the roadside, stripped of worth, cut off from the world. And there he sits, with life just passing him by.

Until Jesus passes through. Until the light of the world draws near and somehow the light that was in Bartimaeus begins to awaken again, he cries out using the messianic title, Son of David-

He somehow knows that this is the one the world has been waiting for —, this is the one HE has been waiting for, the one who can draw him out of his DARKNESS and he cries out again and again, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me."

What happened to him to throw him into darkness? To cause the light within him to go out? So that he became a nothing and a nobody, worthless and cast him aside? We don't know.

Many of us, however, DO know the experience of feeling worthless, cut off and alienated from the world. Sometimes this happens to us through grief and loss- where we're so hollowed out inside, it seems that we've lost our very selves;

Most often it's the attitudes of others that cause us to feel worthless- through judgment, condemnation, shaming, or we may feel that way because of our judgment of ourselves- our failure, our wrong doing.

For some of us it doesn't take much, especially if we've been wounded in the past. As human beings, we're tender, sensitive creatures, not made of wood or stone.

Maybe someone ignores us, or fails to understand us. Or some small failure of our own crushes us- something we've said or done or not said or done. We can so quickly become again the small child who was maybe overly criticised or rejected and that sense of worthlessness overwhelms us.

For some, it may be the result of deep trauma. We may have been abused and shamed, and the light of who God created us to be has gone out. Or maybe we have done some deep wrong and we're crushed by the weight of our guilt and it just doesn't seem possible to get up and start again.

Over the last few weeks many of us have been deeply affected by tragedy of one kind and another: The loss of a bright young man in our midst who was enveloped in a darkness that we will never know or understand.

Eva Olsson's visit last Sunday morning, that brought us face to face with the horrors of the holocaust; and Joy Sumyi Lee in the evening, speaking of children abused in the sex trade.

That is a huge amount of darkness in this world for us to process- many of us have been left drained, depressed, grief stricken, full of questions about the world we live in and the reality of God. And we may even feel that WE are on the side of the road, unable to see a way forward.

In a strange kind of way, sitting on the side of the road for a while can be blessed. Our stillness may allow us to discover truth. We see in today's scripture that as Bartimaeus sits on the side of the road in darkness, the light of the world draws near.

If, like Bartimaeus, we can recognise that the light is not far from us, if we can find the courage to reach for it, we can find meaning and purpose again, even DEEPER, CLEARER and MORE SURE than we have known before.

The darkness can actually make Christ's light appear for us clearer and surer. So how does this happen? How do we move from darkness to light? How are we restored to life? One thing is for sure, the process is not instantaneous- for some of us it may take many years. But there is a pattern that can be observed.

I watched a remarkable Israeli movie the other night-"Waltz with Bashir"- a documentary about an event during the Lebanese civil war, where Muslims are massacred by the Christian Phalanges, a massacre that the Israelis were apparently complicit in, in that they stood by and allowed it to happen, when they could have prevented it.

The Israeli director of the movie, Ari Folman, tells his own story. Ari was in Lebanon at the time of the massacre. 20 years later he can remember nothing. His mind has simply cut out the trauma of the event.

What is unusual about the documentary is that it is an animated movie. This gives the viewer the curious experience of being a little disconnected from life.

Ari determines to find out what happened. As he talks to people who were also there, images and memories begin to return, until he gets to the point of the massacre itself.

In the movie we are shown the grieving animated figures of women, wailing for their sons, their husbands, their brothers, and then something happens- it actually takes the viewer a few seconds to realise that we are no longer looking at animated figures, suddenly they've become real, we're seeing real documentary footage of real women wailing and grieving.

It's a curious experience - switching from animated to real- it's as though light has come into the darkness- despite the depth of agony that we are watching, something lifts, a veil is lifted, we see truth, and with it there comes a surge of hope.

Have you ever had the experience where you're in conflict with someone and you pray to God for light- for the other person to see and to understand, and God answers your prayer by giving light to YOU so YOU can see what YOU'VE done wrong? Ouch!

There's this mixture in a single moment of pain and hope. Pain because it's horrible to see one's own failure, but hope because now we know the truth, and can maybe DO something. There IS a way forward.

Jesus says the truth will set us free, and it does. He also says he will send into our midst an advocate, the Spirit of Truth, and whenever we seek God's light, that Spirit of truth comes alongside of us.

Has the judgment of others shaped how we see ourselves? So that we believe that we are worth nothing, that we are nobody? When we reach for God's light, the Spirit of truth shows us who we really are: precious sons and daughters of God. And we can move on.

Does our grief maybe tell us that there's no future, nothing to live for, nothing to hope for? The Spirit of Truth, the Advocate comes alongside of us and shows us how in all things the Holy Spirit works for good, according to God's purposes, and we find ourselves called into DOING that good and SERVING God's purposes. And we can move on

We don't know what happened to Bartimaeus to throw him into darkness. We do know that he doesn't find his way to the light entirely on his OWN. There are some who say to Bartimaeus, "take heart, get up, Jesus is calling you".

It seems we need OTHERS to ENCOURAGE the light in us. We need others to BELIEVE in us, to believe in GOD on our behalf. We need others to believe that we are not beyond help, that we're not beyond God's mercy and compassion.

Some of the crowd apparently FAIL to see Bartimaeus in this light. When he seeks the light, when he cries out to Jesus in his pain, how do they respond? They order him sternly to be quiet.

They treat him as an IMPEDIMENT to Jesus mission rather than the POINT of his mission. . They may be on the road with Jesus, but they are walking in the dark.- their eyes need to be opened too.

And so Jesus stands still. And the whole procession grinds to a halt, scraping each other's heels and bumping heads. They all have to put on the brakes and stand still. So everyone can hear the loud

cries, “Jesus have mercy in me”, and everyone can hear Jesus speak into the stillness: “call him here”.
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This is what it means to walk with Jesus- to call the one who is suffering to Jesus side.

And so in the stillness that Jesus provides, and through the encouragement of others, Bartimaeus gets up, leaves behind the fragile protection of his cloak, and stumbles towards the light.

Jesus encourages him to speak the desire of his heart, he says “my teacher let me see again” and he does- he is set free to walk in the light, to follow Jesus on the way.

Today in baptism we welcomed two small babies on this road of discipleship. We welcomed them to walk with us on the way, even though they’re not yet walking or talking, and seemingly have little yet to offer. And so we affirm their infinite value to God without their having to DO anything to earn it.

We sprinkled water on their heads as a sign of the new life that marks this journey. As a sign of the light that will always reach for them in the depths.

There is no greater blessing that we can give to our children than this: to place them in the light of Christ and in the arms of community, that is the body of Christ.

As followers of Jesus we need a community of light. We need one another. When one of us is in darkness we need the faith and encouragement of others to bring us to the one who is the light of the world. And as we are drawn into the light, we in turn encourage others to come into the light.

The world is full of Nobodies. Full of people suffering, lost, abandoned, discouraged, shunned, regarded as worthless- full of nobodies sitting on the side of the road.

It’s easy to become overwhelmed: we know we cannot reach out to everyone. But if we will stand still with Jesus (as we do right now by coming to church); if we will listen for the cry that is near us, Jesus will tell us WHO to call to his side.

And when in the stillness we hear Jesus voice, “Call him here, call her”, we may find ourselves, like Joy Sumyi Lee for example, going half way around the world to Cambodia, to connect with children sold as sex slaves, to encourage and love them into believing that they are daughters and sons of God with infinite worth.

Or we may go only as far as our church basement to feed the hungry at our community meal, sitting at table together, a sign of friendship and welcome.

Or we may even stay in our own home and bring to God in prayer those people whose cry we hear in our hearts. Maybe the cry we hear is not of people but of the earth itself.

As many people as there are in this room, there are missions, calls, and cries to be answered. None of us can answer them all; but each of us is sent to bring someone somewhere into the light.

We do not have to heal their lives, we cannot- that is God’s work, but we have a role in loving them and encouraging them to come and seek the light.

We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that when we follow Jesus everything will become clear—that our call will become clear, that walking in the light means we will see where we are going. We will NOT see where we are going.

All that we will know is who it is that we journey with: the one who is the light of the world, and that is enough. We will not have a disciples' "to do" list"; we will need to throw away our agendas as Bartimaeus tossed away his cloak;

We will simply come with the knowledge that in God's eternal plan WE are useful, that God has designed us for a particular purpose, and we don't have to know what it is, we just need to make ourselves available to God.

This is how the light reaches into the darkness, through every precious child of God coming to know again their own light and allowing the light of the world to shine through us.

To God be all the praise the honour and the glory. Amen.