

Job 42: 1-6; 10-17
Psalm 34: 1-8 (19-22)
Hebrews 7: 23-28
St. Mark 10: 46-52

Pentecost 23 2024.

“Go your way; your faith has made you well.” Mark 10: 52a

Autumn. For some of us, it’s the season when the insects are gone, and we can enjoy the crisp air. Others of us might be thinking of hunting. Yet others might be dreading the coming ice and snow and bitter cold, which we’re getting hints of, early on these fall mornings... For others yet, we can start to enjoy football games on the television...

I’m not a huge American football fan, but a few years ago, I happened to be in the company of some guys who were watching and cheering a professional football game, on TV... My memory is that these guys were rooting for a team, the Green Bay Packers. Man, what a noisy bunch of young guys! (Some beer might have been consumed...) They hollered. They hooted. If a referee called up a member of the team they were rooting for, then surely he was the most terrible referee that ever walked the earth... On the other hand, if a referee challenged a member of the other team, then he was far too slow!... My main memories were (A) how noisy the room was; (B) how sure these young men were, that they knew better, than the people actually on the football field...

You probably get the idea; and if you happen to be a football fan and the Packers are your team, please know I mean no disrespect... But thinking about it afterwards (as I sometimes do), it’s probably no surprise that I gravitate from football, to the New Testament. (I’m hopeless; I know...) It can be so easy, from the view of a spectator, to think that *our* perspective is obvious to all. Or, with the benefit of hindsight, to think that some theological fact must be obvious to all...

For example, for those of us in the Church family in the 21st century, it can seem so obvious to some of us that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is God’s masterful solution, that we can sometimes be a little impatient: Why didn’t those first followers of Jesus pay closer attention?... Why were the religious leaders of the day so dismissive of Jesus?... But I respectfully suggest that we likely need to be a little more gracious; a little more patient... Even things which are true, are not always obvious at the time... It’s not always obvious at the time...

Today’s reading from Mark 10 is one of those times, I suggest... The context is that Jesus of Nazareth, with a small band of followers, is outside the town of Jericho, south of Jerusalem. Now, nearby there was a blind beggar, named Bartimaeus... Bartimaeus was no doubt confined to a miserable life – unable to function well in daily life, without anything like the medical care that we now so often take for granted, Bartimaeus sits in the dirt near the side of the road, hoping that a few kind souls will drop a few coins his way, rather than curse at him or ignore him...

Then Jesus passes by... Bartimaeus probably doesn't know much about Jesus... He certainly doesn't know about the crucifixion and resurrection, which will happen in the future. He might have heard some rumours – what the Canadian songwriter Bruce Cockburn calls “rumours of glory” – that there was something special about this young wandering rabbi from the town of Nazareth... Interestingly, Bartimeaus knows that Jesus is related to the great King David, because Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!...”

The healthy people who can easily walk around try to sush Bartimaeus up; (he is surely low on the social scale), but that makes Batimaeus cry out even more, “Son of David, have mercy on me...”

And Jesus... stops... Jesus has a stunning capacity to notice people on the margins of life – the prostitutes; the tax collectors; the lepers; the sinners; and the blind Bartemaeus... Leave it to his friends to worry about his schedule or where to get the next meal, or where to sleep that night. Jesus... stops... Everything... stops!... Then, Jesus says the most tender words: “What do you want me to do for you?...”

Christians believe that Jesus is far, far more than a simple rabbi or a surprising prophet. God is at work in a new way, in this dusty corner of Roman-occupied Palestine. God is at work through Jesus, in stunning, surprising ways... The person and work of Jesus is in some sense associated with the universe's Creator... Yet, Jesus stops, and turns to Bartimaeus, and says the most tender words: “What do you want me to do for you?...”

You see, these words aren't just for Bartimaeus. They ring across the world, across the years – to us...

Jesus heals Bartimaeus. The blind man receives new sight. In some sense, we read, Bartimaeus had faith. In his blindness and brokenness, Bartimaeus dared to reach out beyond himself, to hope for a better future – to dare to believe that life could be different; and somehow, the presence of Jesus of Nazareth was all wrapped up in this potential new beginning...

You see, there can be different kinds of sight which are lacking... In John 9, another story of the healing of a blind man, John shows that the healing work of God in our lives in not merely on a physical level (although it may be that too)... We can have a spiritual short-sightedness – even a spiritual blindness – which can disable our functioning beautifully as much as if we are a blind beggar on the side of the road... None of us is perfect. We are some combination of beautiful life and deep brokenness, with flashes of glory all around us...

But we aren't meant to stay still, you see... We're invited to throw off the mantle of whatever weighs us down, and dare to reach out – dare to cry out – to this amazing Son of David, who transforms the world for ever...

It's okay to admit that sometimes we are hurting... It's a good thing to desire something better, through the work of God himself...

We don't have to have it all together. I'm not even sure that we have to understand everything about this spiritual good news, before we approach (as it were) Jesus on the road near Jericho...

So, a large part of the story of belonging to this weird, wonderful Church family around the globe, experienced in a local church like St. Brice's, is a common acknowledgment of our need for something more – some forgiveness; some healing; some life – and God's capacity to provide it, through Jesus, the Christ... We're all at different stages on this journey, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we are helping one another home...

This morning, Blaze and Becky are being baptized... It's a wonderful new chapter in their lives! It is both acknowledging our need for something more, and receiving it, through the work of the Spirit of the Lord. We're celebrating our journey together, whichever point along the journey we are. And, we give praise and honour to the One who created us, the One who welcomes us home, like the father in the Prodigal Son, joyfully, with arms (as it were) open wide to receive...

Thanks be to God.