

It Must Be Gratitude

Sermon for Oct 24 2021

Gospel reading: Mark 10:46–52

They came to Jericho. And as [Jesus] was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

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Jericho.

The happiest place on earth, or so I was told by the guide that brought us there. If the air is thin and the oxygen is rare at high altitudes, then the reverse is also true. The air is thick and the oxygen is abundant at low altitudes. And Jericho is the lowest city on the planet at 800 feet below sea level.

Oxygen makes us feel good for several reasons. Perhaps that’s why Jericho is also the oldest known city on the planet, with walls dating back 11,000 years. Elisha’s Spring is located there. It’s been transformed into a beautiful oasis, as the water still flows from this spring.

The Mount of the Transfiguration is also located there. There is a monastery there, built in the high cliffs, above the city, by the Crusaders in 1099. Someday I hope to visit that fortress. There is a cable car that will take you there. But the guide warned us that we didn’t have time to go there and back before the bus had to leave. So I did not go. I was devastated to learn that some members of our group skipped lunch and went anyway, with plenty of time to see the grounds and return. I would gladly have skipped lunch to go and see a Crusader fortification.

Many famous events have taken place here. And today we retell the story of Jesus healing another blind man. And in the story, Jericho shows itself, once more, to be the happiest place on earth.

The man called out to Jesus, “Yeshuah! Son of David, have mercy on me!” Mark this... we are told who he is. We are given his full name, like it should be recognizable and important to the reader. “You don’t mean THAT Bartimaeus?” “Oh yes, I most certainly do.”

I gather he might have been personally known by members of Mark’s audience. Bartimaeus must have been aware that Jesus had performed other similar miracles... Mark paints a picture of a somewhat frantic individual desperate to draw Jesus’ attention.

And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he begins to cry out even more...

“Son of David, have mercy on me!” And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

Isn’t that interesting... in this case Jesus doesn’t call the man himself... he instructs the shushers to stop shushing and call him. *YOU GUYS... stop trying to shut him up and TALK TO him. Treat him like a PERSON.* This seems to change their attitudes more positively.

And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.”

Now watch this...

⁵⁰And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

This poor guy GLADLY, and with NO SECOND THOUGHTS, gives up all he has and follows Jesus. NO hesitation. Remember the rich young man from a few lessons ago? He wanders off deeply troubled... What a contrast. This guy without skipping a beat moves immediately to Jesus.

⁵¹And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

Or put another way, “How may I help you?” “What would you like me to do for you?” Jesus phrases his willingness to help him, in the subjective... “What is it that you desire, that I might in some way be of service to you?”

And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.”

The text says, *Rabbi, that I might see again...* Indicating that he was once able to see. And so that his sight might be recovered, or that he would be able to see again. Again... this too is in the subjunctive mood and so it is expressed as a wish or desire. (I checked the original language because I wanted to see if there was a “please” indicated in his request. But I suppose that is a construct of English politeness. I think it might be inferred in the text.)

And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

How strange this seems to me. To the rich man, who wanted to inherit eternal life, Jesus extended an invitation to him... give up all that you have, and then follow me. But to this man, who indeed gives up his only possession (“casting off his cloak”) he tells this man to “GO on his way.” I find that odd. On the other hand, we don’t see the man walking away, happy or sad... we see that HE continues to follow Jesus as they go on their way. And I find that strange as well.

This man has just recovered his sight! I would think that such a remarkable gift, would send him going away with “better things to do” than follow Jesus... But THIS man isn’t leaving. This man isn’t running off in pursuit of his own agenda...

A blind man gets his sight back, and he chooses to follow Jesus. How can he contain his excitement? And simply follow and NOT go his own way?

If I was given this part to play, what would be my motivation? The text doesn’t say. There are very few clues here apart for the description of the behavior.

A clearly desperate man gets his sight back... and follows where Jesus leads... It must be gratitude.

I think gratitude, true gratitude, can overwhelm our self-directed impulses. And cause us to become humble and joyful at the same time.

Rich or poor... Everyone is dealing with something. There is so much change going on in the world right now, and all that change just adds to all the other stuff we all carry. And the thing is that a lot of people are near capacity to begin with.

In the crisis management courses I’ve taken, we learn to define a crisis as when the demands on our resources overwhelm our ability to cope with those demands. These demands can be physical or emotional. Social media has only compounded the stress

placed on our emotional resources. News and other sources of information bombard our reserves.

Often we are just a few inches above water treading along. Just so long as nothing stirs up the surface, we might be doing "FINE" for the moment, but it wouldn't take much to sink our ship. This can be true of our finances and families and jobs or whatever else draws off or adds to our ability to cope with the demands.

In our lesson today we see a desperate man and desperate need. Perhaps his ONE AND ONLY opportunity is passing him by. When will he ever be this near to Jesus ever again? It's not like he could go out and look for him. This is IT...

We also see the behavior of the crowd... they have little or no tolerance for his interference. They rebuke him. They demand that he shut his mouth. The implication is that they have no compassion for this man or his troubles... they just want him to be silenced and go away.

The fact that we are told that at this attempt by the masses to get rid of him and make him be quiet, actually causes him to become even more desperate... the word is KRAZEN... he begins to shriek! That's a desperate word for sure, it seems to indicate a man who is being held back, and is attempting to climb over his obstacles.

And that's what they are... obstacles to his relief. If they only had an ounce of compassion for the man, treating him like a brother or family.... But no... he's just an inconvenience and an annoyance.

But not to Jesus, who treats him like a prince... "What can I do for you today, my good sir." Like Jesus is HIS servant. And he lifts the burden of blindness from this man. He is no longer an annoyance or an inconvenience, Not to Jesus... Jesus doesn't just give him his sight back... he gives him his dignity back... His manhood, his personhood. He is the equal of all who are in the crowd.

And Jesus tells the man that he is free to go... In the former story of the rich man, St. Mark tells us Jesus loved the man. He also tells us that Jesus lets him go his own way. St. Mark doesn't say that Jesus loved the blind man specifically. But he heals him and sends him on his way...

I'm reminded of the saying that if you love someone, set them free. If they love you, they will come back to you... And what does the man do? He becomes a disciple and follows where Jesus leads. Why? It must be gratitude.

Our Lord has given you so much more than the return of your sight...
In faith he has set you free, free from your sins; free from eternal death; free to live in his kingdom forever. He has gone there to prepare a place for you.

You know... I suppose the man could have returned home, as Jesus said to him, *Go... your faith has made well*, and I don't suppose Jesus would have thought any less of him. But when he turns to follow Jesus. Jesus doesn't send him away either. I'm not sure what GO is supposed to mean in this context... Go home or go into all the world. But those who are grateful to the Savior can show their gratitude either way. Amen