

Proper 25, Year B

October 25, 2015

Mark 10:46-52 *They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimae'us son of Timae'us, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." 52 Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.*

In last week's Gospel, James and John, who along with Peter formed the inner core of Jesus' Disciples, came up to Jesus and asked that Jesus give them whatever they asked for. Jesus responded, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they replied, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." They wanted for themselves what the world of their day most wanted: honor, status, and power.

In *today's* Gospel, Jesus asks a blind beggar, Bartimaeus, the *exact same question* he asked James and John: "What do you want me to do for you?" But rather than asking for honor, wealth, or power, Bartimaeus asks, "My teacher, let me **see** again."

Now I must note at this point that in 6 of the 10 Bible translations I normally use, the word "again" does not appear; Bartimaeus simply says, "let me see." It's a crucial distinction, since "see again" implies that the man had previously had physical eyesight but had lost it; the whole emphasis is on physical eyesight. But if Bartimaeus is simply saying, "let me see," that opens up the possibility that what he is asking for is not simply **physical** sight, but **spiritual** sight; and there is *strong* evidence that Mark intends **both** understandings. You see, it turns out that this translational issue in today's Gospel is exactly the same problem translators run into when dealing with the story of Nicodemus in John's Gospel (3:1-21). You may remember that Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born – and depending on your Bible translation the next words are either "again" or "from above". In exactly the same way, the Greek word in today's Gospel can be translated either "look up," "see again," or simply "see".* In fact, the same verb used in today's Gospel is used 4 other times in Mark's Gospel, and in three of those times, it is used when Jesus "looks up to heaven". (6:41; 7:34; 16:4) In short, there is every reason to translate Bartimaeus' response to Jesus' question in this way: "My Teacher, let me see from above." It is a request to see life through God's eyes.

This translation is further supported by the fact that Bartimaeus, while still physically blind, nonetheless could already see with the eye of his spirit some truths about Jesus that others with perfect eyesight do *not* see. The very first words out of blind Bartimaeus' mouth are, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He says this twice. That tells us immediately that blind Bartimaeus *sees* Jesus as the Messiah (Son of David), and that blind Bartimaeus *sees* this Messiah to be merciful. This physically blind man already sees spiritual truth more clearly than

do most of Jesus' disciples. When Jesus asks him what he would like Jesus to do for him, Bartimaeus doesn't ask for places of honor like James and John do; he asks to be able to see from above. Because God longs to open the eyes of our mind and spirit, Jesus immediately grants Bartimaeus' request. And in being spiritually healed, he is at the same time physically healed. "Go," Jesus tells him, "your faith has made you whole."

James and John – and so often, I think, you and I – see the world through the lens of "what will benefit me or my group in some way." But that is a very constricted, self-interested view of life. Bartimaeus, *blind* Bartimaeus, sees the world from a deeper, more spiritual point of view. *He* desires what **God** desires *for* him, which is not honor or wealth, but wholeness, and the ability to see from above, see the world from God's perspective. When we are truly whole in the spiritual sense and can see life from God's perspective, we are freed *from* a life of self-seeking *for* a life of self-offering – which is the kind of life Jesus lived. It is the kind of life characteristic of the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constantly giving themselves to one another to such an extent that they are One. You and I were created in the image of God, which means we were created FOR this life of self-giving. We are truly whole when we participate in that totally other-centered giving and receiving which is the life of the Holy Trinity. I believe that this is what Bartimaeus *asks* for, knowing that this is where Jesus lives, and trusting that Jesus can and will bring him – and anyone else who asks – into that Trinitarian flow.

Now, if Jesus were to ask you or me, "What do you want me to do for you?", would we – like Bartimaeus – ask to see from God's perspective, to see from above? Ask to be whole – spiritually and relationally? Oh, there's no doubt we want to be whole *physically*; health care is hugely important to us. Smoking is banned from every building. Trans fats are not to be found anywhere. Hand washing and disinfectant gels are being strongly encouraged, as is physical exercise. We are learning to be good stewards of our bodies.

But what of our faith? Are we being good stewards of our faith?

It is easy to forget that our *faith* needs to be exercised as much as our bodies do, or our faith will atrophy. We know how silly it would be to say, "Oh, I attended Physical Education classes in grade school, so I don't need to exercise anymore." Why do some of us think that because we attended Sunday School or Confirmation classes as a child we no longer need to exercise our faith, to grow spiritually? No longer need to study the Bible or read spiritual books, attend classes, pray every day, or exercise our faith in outward acts – forgiving those who have hurt us, doing good deeds, using our time, talent, and treasure in godly ways? Health experts recommend moderate physical exercise – at least 3-4 days a week – if we are to be good stewards of our physical bodies. One day a week won't cut it. *Why*, then, would we think that attending church for an hour **one** day a week makes us good stewards of our faith?

My friends, our Christ Church predecessors down through the years did a wonderful job being stewards of this beautiful building. It has not been allowed to lapse into disrepair, despite the significant costs of maintaining such an old, historical building. And *we* have **continued** that fine stewardship of this house of God. But we have a far more *important* heritage which has been passed down to us: the heritage of our faith, for which we are *also* called to be stewards. St. Paul wrote of this heritage of faith in a letter to his disciple Timothy, telling the young

Christian, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you...” (2 Tim. 1:5)

To fan into flame the gift of God which is in you! My friends, we talk about being good stewards of the gifts God has given us – good stewards of our time, talent, and treasure. But there is an underlying, **prerequisite** stewardship to which we are called, and that is the stewardship of our *faith in God*, which we are being called to fan into flame! Without *that*, any talk of stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure has no grounding, no basis. Without the perspective of faith, that sight from above which tells us that everything we have we have been entrusted with, for a lifespan, by God – without that perspective of faith, we are left with the overpowering perspective of *this* world, which tells us that everything that we have is **ours** – that we are *owners*, not *stewards*. My friends, if that is the lens through which we are viewing the world, it is no **wonder** that we resist *any* talk of “Stewardship of our Time, Talent, and Treasure”. Heaven *forbid* that we even hint or insinuate that we are *not owners* of OUR time, OUR talent, and especially OUR money and possessions. Yet as we near the end of the Church Year in the following weeks, we will read in our Sunday lectionary more and more passages from Scripture that remind us that this world will not last forever. I just returned from celebrating my Dad’s 90th birthday, and I can tell you that he is facing the fact that the day is coming when he will have to give up everything he thought he owned, but actually had only been entrusted with for a time.

As we approach the season when we focus on stewardship, it is crucial to remember that there is an underlying, prerequisite stewardship necessary before we can begin to make sense of our stewardship of the “3Ts” – Time, Talent, and Treasure. It is a fourth “T”: the stewardship of Trust in God; the stewardship of our faith. Have we allowed it to grow cold? Then perhaps we need to fan it into flame! Perhaps we need to courageously examine our lives and honestly ask whether we are being as good stewards of our faith – our prayer life, spiritual growth, service of others, etc. – as we are of our physical health and financial well-being.

My friends, Jesus asks you and me the same question he asked James, John, and Bartimaeus: “What do you want me to do for you?”

I would encourage you to spend some time this week answering that question. What do you want Christ to do for you?

AMEN

* Joel Marcus, Anchor Yale Bible Vol. 27A: *Mark 8-16*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 594, 761. *See also:* Geoffery W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985, p.710