

Healing the Brokenness of the World

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek

Proper 25, Year B

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Ventura, California

October 28, 2018

Old blind Bartimaeus was sitting by the side of the road begging just as he did day in and day out. On this particular day, a large crowd passed by. He overheard them talking about Jesus of Nazareth and realized that Jesus wasn't just a topic of conversation, but that he was actually there among them. He decided to act quickly, so Bartimaeus shouted out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

"Be quiet!" The people ordered him as they pushed their way past. In their minds, Jesus didn't need to pay any attention to the blind beggar on the street. Surely he did not have time for such an unimportant person.

Bartimaeus' brokenness lies in the fact that he is blind but there's more to it than that. You see, everyone thinks that it's his fault. They thought that blindness was a result of sin. And though they may not have had any idea why God made him that way, surely it was because he deserved it.

Remember when Jesus and the disciples encountered a blind man in the Gospel of John, "His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"¹ Jesus said it was neither.

At that time (and to some extent even in our time) people with physical imperfections were not just disabled, they were shamed and shunned. They were considered unworthy and they knew it.

¹ John 9:2

Jesus' mission is to heal the brokenness of the world and so he reaches out to Bartimaeus and heals him with a word, "Go; your faith has made you well."

We've encountered lots of blind people on our journey through the gospel of Mark this year. Some of them have been physically blind and some have been spiritually blind. We saw it even in last week's lesson when James and John asked for preferential treatment in the heavenly kingdom.

They said to Jesus, "Teacher we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And when Jesus asked what they wanted, they said, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

“You do not know what you are asking,” Jesus said. Then he explained, “...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”²

At this point, Jesus is near the end of his earthly journey but his disciples are still blind to the true message of his ministry and have little understanding for what they see as the upside down ways of the kingdom to come. Though it would be nice for the disciples to understand, it is not required. One can have faith without understanding, and even the spiritual blindness of his closest followers and dearest friends will not deter Jesus.

² ² Mark 10:35-45

How is this relevant to our lives and to our faith? What does all this have to do with us? More than you might think. You see, what was Jesus' mission, healing the brokenness of the world, is now our mission. Today, we are the disciples called to continue the work of the Jesus movement. So, we need to ask ourselves, how will we help to heal the brokenness of the world in our time, in this place, among today's followers, for those we've never met and and for our closest friends?

Brokenness and an abundance of hatred and violence is all around us. Yesterday's shooting in Pittsburg is another in a long stream of violent acts. The news is filled with stories of what happens when some believe that they deserve more, that they deserve better and that they are entitled to dismiss the needs and concerns of their neighbors or even act out violently. Is the brokenness growing? Or is it possible that a small piece of the iceberg of the

silent, hidden brokenness of the world has risen up and more and more is beginning to show. Yes there are terrible acts and unimaginable pain. There are also lots of people in our who have acted with the strength and courage of Bartimaeus refusing to be pushed aside and remain silent any longer, insisting to be heard. That's not an easy thing to do!

Bartimaeus was very brave in this story. He drew attention to himself in a loud and unacceptable way. He was criticized by the people around him who insisted that he be quiet. Yet, he continued.

And what did Jesus do? He stopped and called Bartimeus forward. The crowd changed their tone, and someone even encouraged him saying, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

Bartimaeus sprang up and threw off his cloak – a brave thing for a blind man to do. A pretty faithful thing too.

Then standing before Jesus, Bartimaeus heard him say, “What do you want me to do for you?” There’s a good question. Bartimaeus knew immediately what his request would be. Do you? If Jesus called you to come and asked what you wanted him to do for you, what would your request be?

I wonder, what would happen if Jesus granted us the wish that Bartimaeus asked for? What if Jesus made it so that we could see? So many of us are blind. If we could see clearly, if we could see as God sees, then the kingdom of heaven wouldn’t seem so upside down with the last being first and the first being last. It would all seem just right. In the light of Divine love and compassion, it would all make sense.

In many ways, we continue to make our way through life blind. So, we look to this story, and others like it to shed some light on the ways and concerns of God and to inspire us to hope and to action.

What can we glean from today's gospel? One thing seems pretty clear, no one is unimportant. God favors not the rich and powerful but the vulnerable, the broken, and the oppressed. That's where God's heart is, with them. Just as he traveled with the caravan of Israelites fleeing Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land, God travels in caravans of people escaping danger and searching for a new home. God weeps with children who are hungry, sick, scared or separated from their families. God reaches out to the blind and wants us to that as well.

- May we one day open our eyes and see as God sees.
- Until then, let us learn from these lessons and do what Jesus did.
- Let us stop, listen, reach out in compassion, act for justice and for peace, and remember that no one is unimportant in the eyes of God.

In the name of the God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.