

Healing Found In Faith

Psalm 34:1-8, 19-22; Mark 10:46-52

My first question for you today is this: how many of you have been told to be quiet at some point in your life? (*People raise their hands*) I like it. How many of you have been told in a church to sit and be quiet? (*People raise their hands*) Many. How many of you have been silenced in your life? Told that what you were about to say or what you were sharing was inappropriate, that you should keep your mouth shut? Any?

It's really hard in our lives when we are silenced, and I know that many have been. The story of Bartimaeus is one that gives me great hope for the times when I have felt silenced. When I have been told that what I have been saying is wrong, unimportant, not valued. So to be able to be bold like Bartimaeus and to cry out and to know that I will be heard brings great assurance. Brings me peace in this moment.

I think we all long to feel that sense of wholeness, to have our lives come into balance. When we think about faith, and the Jewish faith specifically, it is about bringing things into balance in our lives. It's about bringing good and evil into balance so that the evil doesn't take over. I think faithful followers find peace and healing when they are moved by the Spirit to see the world through the eyes of Christ, and when they are willing to sink their teeth into the truth of Jesus' teachings and the work of God in the world.

Our psalmist today invites us to "taste and see that God is good". Now, I invite you today not to think of it as something savoury, some delicious flavour that we are going to taste of God. Instead, think about it as something that you really need to chew on. That you really sink your teeth in so that you can come to a deeper understanding of what it is God is calling us to do. What it is that Jesus is teaching us. That it is not something to simply accept and swallow. It is something that we really need to work with.

The Gospel lesson is also inviting us to do things a little bit differently. To see things in a different way. The story of blind Bartimaeus is an invitation to see beyond. To see what even the disciples themselves are failing to see. Jesus, in this moment, is healing the spiritual blindness of his closest followers, who have not fully understood what it means to follow Jesus, and what it is that Jesus is truly offering them.

So what must we do in our own lives to be ready to accept what God is offering us? What must we learn to fully understand what Jesus is truly offering? To help us actually follow him? I want to dig into this lesson from the Gospel a bit more. We first heard that Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. And in the very next sentence, Jesus, the disciples, and now a large crowd were leaving Jericho when they came upon this blind beggar. I wonder what happened in between that sentence. They arrive, and then they were about to leave. You have to think that Jesus was doing what he normally did when he was travelling around: teaching people, questioning people about rules that didn't fit with what God's message was in the world, healing people, listening to people, helping those who were oppressed feel valued.

And then there's this man. A blind man sitting beside the road. Bartimaeus must have heard people talking about what Jesus had done. Heard his name for some reason, for he clearly wasn't able to see Jesus. He might not have even known, for there wasn't any TV back then. But he had heard, obviously, Jesus' name echoing in the crowds. When Bartimaeus heard this, that's when he stood up and called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" I want you to notice that Bartimaeus didn't call him "The Son of God", but rather "The Son of David". Now, this is significant because by proclaiming this, Bartimaeus is actually saying that he believes Jesus to be the Messiah: the Chosen One of God. For it was commonly known that the Messiah was to come as a new Davidic king to restore Israel to political prominence. One of the commentators points out that by doing this, "Bartimaeus also demonstrates that he really does see, despite the fact that he's physically blind, for he sees what others do not."¹

The people around him when Bartimaeus called out did what good church people would do in my mind. They said, "Shh! Quiet." To which Bartimaeus cried out even louder: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And then, what I love about this story: Jesus stood still. Didn't move, but stood still, and then said: "Bring him

¹ Victor McCracken, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 214

here. Call him to me.” Suddenly, the people and the disciples around him changed their tune and told him, “Oh, take heart! It’s all good, cheer up, don’t worry. Jesus wants to talk to you. Come on, Jesus is calling you.” And that’s when Bartimaeus sprang up, threw off his cloak, and came to Jesus.

It’s interesting that he threw off his cloak. His cloak would have been his most prized possession. The piece that gave him comfort, the thing that kept him warm as he was on the road begging. And he did what Jesus was inviting all followers to do: leave everything behind and follow me. He casts off his cloak, and he comes to Jesus and that’s when Jesus does what he did in the story from last week as well when he asked James and John what would they like. Jesus now asks the blind beggar the same question. “What do you want me to do for you?” It takes a lot of boldness to actually ask for what we most need in our lives. Bartimaeus asked, “My teacher, let me see again.” And Jesus said, “Go, for your faith has made you well.” Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus. What I think is interesting about this story is that Jesus didn’t do what he did with other blind people. He didn’t pick up dirt, spit on it, rub it into his eyes. Instead, Jesus simply acknowledged the depth of his faith. It was Bartimaeus’ faith that made him well. The other difference is that with this healing, afterwards, Bartimaeus didn’t go off on his separate way. Jesus says, “Go, for your faith has made you well.” When we heard about the woman who was hemorrhaging, she went off after her faith had made her well. But in this case, Jesus was there, Bartimaeus was healed, and Bartimaeus chose to follow Jesus.

Both the psalmist and Mark in the Gospel are inviting followers to dig deeper. To see things in a different way. To see things through the eyes of God. I wonder how we are spiritually blind. What are the things that are blocking us from truly understanding what Jesus is teaching? From truly seeing people as Jesus does? What are our own spiritual blind spots that need healing?

Cynthia Jarvis writes: “The cry of need that caused Bartimaeus to be shunned by so many becomes the occasion for their glimpse of God’s final intention for Creation in ordinary time. This glimpse is called a miracle. Miracles are those events that bring people from darkness into light. Miracles turn our attention to what really matters in life and in death. Miracles claim no power but reveal a power whose will is to be known. Miracles point beyond the one before us to the one who made us for love’s sake.”² Miracles are truly the work of God.

² Cynthia Jarvis, *Feasting on the Word*, Year B, Volume 4, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 214

What these stories are alerting us to today are the life-altering consequences of trusting with our whole hearts, minds and spirits in the love of God. Being a follower of Jesus Christ is not about gaining privilege and power. It's about knowing that amid the challenges that we face in life that God will answer our prayers. That God will dwell with us in our fear and loneliness. Like Bartimaeus and the psalmist today, we too are being delivered from all our fears, if we but trust and have faith. The psalmist was redeemed. Was rescued, received salvation. According to Hebrew understanding, redemption means being drawn out from one world into another. Salvation suggests deliverance from that which restricts or oppresses us. We are being freed from the people who are silencing us. We are being freed from those things that are holding us back from receiving the love of God. Bartimaeus received salvation. No longer was Bartimaeus to live as he had once done, sitting on the side of the road with his one cloak begging to survive. Bartimaeus, in that moment, was healed and brought to wholeness by his faith. I truly believe Bartimaeus is a perfect example of what it means to be a bold disciple. He refused to be silenced. He refused to be ignored. He claimed his faith with no apology. And because of his bold faith, he tasted and saw that God was good.

So the question remains: how will we – not only as individuals, but as a community of faith – boldly proclaim? What is it that we will ask Jesus to bring healing and wholeness in our midst? What is the urgency, what are the things that we are experiencing that would cause us to seek God's help? Is it the reality that there is no peace in this world? Is it the fact that we are seeing so many people in poverty? Is it because we are noticing more and more people who are isolated and alone, who are seeking relationship? Seeking a place to belong? To be known? What is God calling us to urgently cry out? To receive that faith and belief and hope so that we can be like Bartimaeus and follow Jesus boldly in this world? I hope that you will have the courage to call out to God. Call out for whatever ails you. Call out for healing, acceptance and love, for it will be granted. And for this, we give God thanks. Amen.
