

First Presbyterian Church
"Follow the Leader"
Rev. Catherine Oliver
October 28, 2018
Mark 10:46-52

Mt 11:28-29

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Our Second lesson comes from the Gospel of Mark 10:46-52

Listen for God's word for you.

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many in the crowd sternly ordered him, "be quiet!" But Bartimaeus cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus **stood still** and said to the crowd, "**Call him here.**"

Then the crowd called the blind man, saying to him,

"Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

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

Then Jesus said to him, "**What do you want me to do for you?**"

The blind man said to him, Rabbouni, Teacher, let me see again."

Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well.

Then, immediately he regained his sight **and followed Jesus on the way.**

The Word of the Lord...

As we look at our scripture lesson for today Jesus hears the cries of a blind beggar named Bartimaeus .

In Hebrew the word "Bar" means son. And "Timaus" is ancient Greek. The name Timaus is found in Plato's writings meaning honor or respect. So Bar, (Son), Timaus (Honor/Respect) literally means Son of Honor or Respect.

So we have a bit of a conundrum. What are we to do with a story where a son of honor ends up as a blind beggar? And more importantly, how are we to understand the significance of this story for us today?

I have to believe that we all know sons and daughters of honor and respect that for one reason or another their lives have not turned out as hoped.

These sons and daughters drew the short straw, missed the boat, have become lost by overwhelming stresses in life or simply had some great misfortune.

That is... Until a true leader emerges for them to follow.

And that is exactly what this story teaches us!

What if we could understand, we are all Bar-Timaus, we are all Bat-Timaus (Bat meaning daughter in Hebrew). We are all the sons and daughters of God who all need and deserve honor and respect. And most importantly, we all need a true leader like Jesus to follow.

A few weeks ago my husband Mike was asked to speak at Shades Valley Presbyterian Church about what it is like to live with Lewy Body dementia. Lewy Body dementia is the second leading cause of dementia after Alzheimer's.

I was invited to come along. Shades Valley has an older congregation filled with kind and compassionate people. After dinner Mike, a journalist and wordsmith, got

up to speak. He'd told me earlier that he was feeling forgetful and having "Lewy-moments" most of the day.

I felt anxious for him. As he started speaking I could tell he was having trouble finding his words. He kept looking at me and then told the crowd, "This is a perfect example of Lewy Body dementia. Some days are better than others and I'm having a not so good day today, trying to remember what I'm saying and finding the right words"

My heart was sinking as I sensed some uncomfortable tension in the crowd.

That's when Rev. Mary Porter, Parrish Associate for Shades Valley, popped up and said, "And that is why Catherine is here. Mike and Catherine are a team and she just loves to talk! So Catherine will help Mike with this story!"

Everyone laughed as I took the microphone and Mike and I bounced back and forth telling our story. Kind of like one blind beggar leading the other.

The crowd let go of the uncomfortableness and became incredibly supportive, asking a lot of questions. I realized how important kindness and encouragement can be in a person's life, especially when we are struggling. And for those of you who know Mike, that support gave him the courage to end the program... doing hambone!

Mike and I, like many of you here today know how unimaginably painful it feels to lose control, to lose sight. Whether that be physical sight, emotional sight, or spiritual sight which occurs when our lives take a sudden unexpected turn from what we had hoped for.

Our scripture says that Bartimaeus wanted to **see again**, suggesting that he had had sight at some point in his life, but lost it.

Unlike the crowd at Shades Valley who were kind and supportive, the crowd surrounding Bartimaeus were condescending and critical. "Be quiet, Hush your mouth" they shouted at him.

But Bartimaeus, the son of honor and respect teaches us something here. When we are hurting, alone, begging to be heard we are to cry out!

Bartimaeus teaches us to cry out when help is needed and when everyone else gets irritated, and tells us to hush, we are to cry louder!

And this is so important! Why?

Jesus hears our cries. Jesus hears our cries!

And what did Jesus do when he heard this blind beggar?

Our scripture says that Jesus stopped. He stood still. And then told the jeering and unsupportive crowd,

"Call him here."

And isn't this great? The jeering crowd, the Ne-nabs of negativity crowd changed!

A sign of a true leader is someone who can transform the negativity, hate and fear in a crowd.

A true leader transforms hatred and meanness into kindness, compassion and justice for others.

Praise God, the crowd's hearts changed as they followed Jesus, their unrecognized True Leader. They went from hushing Bartimaeus to encouraging him!

The NIV version of the Bible says the crowd told Bartimaeus to "cheer up, on your feet, Jesus is calling you!"

Our NRSV pew bible says the crowd told him to "get up, take heart, Jesus is calling you!"

This crowd who had been following Jesus, following the True leader, were transformed. When Jesus spoke, the crowd that first focused on shaming and negativity had new eyes to see the importance of compassion and encouragement for a blind beggar.

And Bartimaeus' response, from all of this encouragement?

He didn't just jump up but **he sprang up and threw off his cloak!**

Now, that biblical image makes me hope that he was wearing some undergarments, but anyway this is where Jesus asks a pivotal question.

"What do you want me to do for you?"

Remember, this is the same question we heard Jesus ask Peter and James last week who wanted to be selected above the others disciples. Peter and James had asked to be Velcroed to Jesus one on his right and one on his left, selfishly usurping the other disciples .

But the blind beggar asked not to sit at Jesus' right or left.

The blind beggar simply asked Jesus, "Let me see again."

"And immediately his sight was restored and he followed Jesus on 'The Way'."

I have to wonder if Bartimaeus, the son of honor and respect really knew what he was asking for. Because following Jesus on 'The Way' **is code for** following Jesus to Jerusalem. With his eyesight restored he would have to see the much larger crowds that one-minute shout hosanna and the next shout crucify him.

These days I struggle with preaching healing stories. Yes, I believe in miracles, but no I don't believe in false hope given by commercials or crowds telling you to try more vitamins or think positive thoughts and your illness will go away.

I believe we are all on a journey in this life and it is so very important to follow the True Leader which I claim for me as Jesus. The one who teaches compassion, kindness, justice and grace. The one who is with us always, even as we take our last breath and beyond.

O.K. one last story just to show how God works in miraculous ways.

A few days ago I stopped by the store when a man approached me asking for change.

I told him that I didn't have any "change", which was true. But I began to feel God nudging at me, tap, tap, tap on my shoulder as I went through the check-out line.

Since I was working on this sermon, I decided that I would give the sighted beggar the last few dollars I had in my wallet when I came out of the store.

The guy was so happy to receive the money.

Then he insisted that I take the bag of white bread he was holding. I said "oh no, thank you, you keep it and eat."

He said, "I'm homeless, the bread will go bad, I want **you** to take it!"

Now I love bread and carbs are going to be the death of me, but I insisted that he keep his bread and use the money I gave him for food.

And we almost, o.k. kind of had an argument!

This beggar kept saying "no, I want you to take this bread, you gave me money, I want to have it!"

"No," I said, "**you** keep it! You need food!"

"No, you take it, No you keep it!"

on and on and I honestly began to look around for Candid Camera.

I left him with his bread and the few dollars I had in my wallet.

But as I was driving home I wondered.

Maybe I messed up.

What if this was Jesus offering me the bread of life?

Had I been rude and even blind in refusing this gift from a beggar?

Did I not stop and look closely enough to see?

I began to feel what it must be like to be a blind beggar crying out louder and louder.

So I asked God to forgive me for not having eyes to see,

And I was reminded of this verse....

Mt 11:28-29

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Ugh!

Thank you Jesus for being our leader.

May I learn and we all learn to follow you better.

Amen.

