

“I want to see – an end to suffering”

REFLECTION: October 27, 2024 Rev'd Ian Brown

Mark 10: 46-52 & Job 42: 1 – 6, 10 - 17

Today we have two contrasting suffering stories, and one in the wings. Before we have a go at unravelling these, a poem to begin.

Blindness: A Poem from Padriag O'Tauma

Remember that this has passed before
and that there will be more days
of plenty...eventually.

Pay attention to your feelings
keep those feelings sharp.

Try to hold yourself together
and pull yourself apart.

Keep your eyes on the prize
that you might never gain.

Don't ignore whatever pain is blooming
like a flower that you never planted.

Occupy your hands with kindness.

Remember you can see,
even though this blindness is remarkable.

Mark the places that you're feeling
mark the spaces where you're needing held

mark the evenings that are dark
and mark the afternoon of coping.

Mark the morning that you waken
finding grieving has been taken

to a different part of heartland.

Remember what has passed before.

The two stories we hear today have an end to suffering. Job's suffering has been legendary. Job was scrupulously faithful and enduring, but the New Testament beggar cries out and won't stop when he's told to. Disruptive and disobedient, this poor man won't even do what Jesus tells him to. It's fascinating to reflect on! How does this happen and where does it fit?

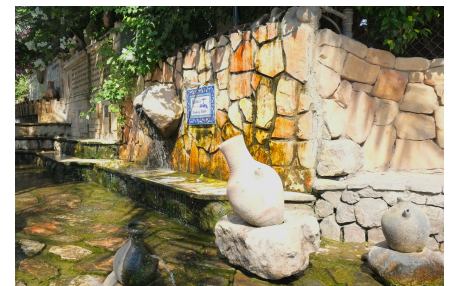
It's Spring in Jericho, one of the oldest city sites in the world. The palm trees are rustling in a slight breeze, the clear waters of the springs are rippling through the aqueducts. The site is on the edge of the river flats of the lower Jordan river. We're not far from the Dead Sea; close to the lowest place on earth and mostly hot. A young Rabbi and his disciples have set out on a fateful journey to Jerusalem.

As they leave Jericho, a blind beggar, cries out for mercy. Some tell him to stop whingeing and shut up. Bartimaeus was a nobody! His name is 'son' of Timaeus. If "Timaeus" sounds vaguely familiar, it might be from philosophy. Timaeus is the title of Plato's most famous dialogue. In *Timaeus*, Plato contrasts "seeing" the mere physical world, while being "blind" to Eternal Truths. The educated of Mark's readers knew what he was up to.

- *looking over Jericho*



- *Elisha's Spring,
Jericho*



And so, just outside Jericho – remember it was the first place in the promised land the Hebrews came to after the exodus - here, Bartimaeus begs Jesus, "Rabbi, I want to see!" He's looking for a fulfillment of promise, for an exodus from his suffering. He flags a deeper seeing and then he follows to Jerusalem, with Palm Sunday just a few verses ahead. Deeper meaning is echoing all through this story.

Let's think about who is involved here and what is at stake. Anyone in his day who was disabled or not quite whole in some way was seen as unproductive, a burden to their peers and, were thought of as cursed by God. Disabled people couldn't mix in normal society; there were even

religious laws that kept them out of the temple. For a blind beggar there was nothing but begging, an ongoing suffering that was physical and social and psychological. Bartimaeus was dehumanized and disempowered.

With our medical understanding and with hindsight, we can see that people like this were outcasts through no fault of their own and had to suffer their disability with no help, being cut off from society. We like to think that we know and do better in our enlightened times, but I'm sure we still categorize people and stigmatize those who aren't so well off. Bartimaeus was the sort of person you wouldn't want disturbing your peace. 'Tell him to be quiet, for God's sake,' the crowd were saying, we don't want him distracting Jesus.

So it might be a surprise to us that Bartimaeus, the last person we'd expect anything from, Blind begging, Bartimaeus is the one who shows great faith and who sees Jesus clearly. His faith is contrast with the disciples. The disciples were, in many ways blind to Jesus, even still. But the physically blind Bartimaeus could, in a sense, see the truth about Jesus. He calls out, 'Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me.' He shares in the miracle of enlightenment, with the writer giving a nod and a wink to a blind man and probably to Plato as well. Then, there's an echo of the journey to the promised land, with Jesus setting off for Jerusalem.

Just before this, James and John asked for outrageous personal favors from Jesus, that's some contrast. It makes me wonder what would we ask for? Perhaps we would ask for better sight: that we might see more clearly the path Jesus takes through the maze of this complex and often confusing time. For clearer insight on when to speak and when to be silent on issues? When to stubbornly dig your heels in and when to compromise for Christ's sake? How do we best follow Jesus, in the cause of the needs in our world. We all know there are many crying out for help, but it's a faith question first.

This is the last of the healing miracles in Mark's gospel. Bartimaeus stands at the end of this aspect of Jesus ministry and shows that it's

those who exercise their faith in Jesus who see the truth and find the reality of the kingdom.

"Go, your faith has made you well," he says. It's not; 'yes, I'll heal you' or 'God will help you my son'. The end of his suffering comes as the result of two things; his crying out in need and his faith. The two are not opposites, they may be more closely related than Job, his friends or even we like to think. When biblical writers speak about the nature of faith, there's most often a story, or the example of particularly faithful person. A person like Job or an example like Bartimaeus. Faith is something that's exercised as we live and trust. It happens as the story unfolds and sometimes, we don't even see the faith that we have until we look back with hindsight.

Our faith is often given the most exercise when we see a need and try to respond. The one thing we could all agree on, is that we want see an end to suffering. The end of Job's suffering sounds as contrived to our ears as the heavenly court did at the outset. Job has endured, but the gloss of reward at the end doesn't add much to helping people in their suffering. Jesus does not endorse the answer in Job. But Bartimaeus' story encourages those who want to see an end to suffering to name it, to express dissatisfaction with it and to ask for an end to it.

May our faith be simple, like that of Bartimaeus. Faith to name what is wrong, to speak up, to cry out about what dehumanizes and disempowers - and ask for an end to it. Then perhaps we, who often don't see what we should, might have a clearer sight and find a way to respond with justice and compassion to the cries we hear around us.

May our faith continue to grow and help us to know what we really need and to see with the eyes of faith. Amen.