

Rev. Betsy Welliver Sentigar
Christ Episcopal Church - Towanda, Pa
22nd Sunday after Pentecost- Year B- Proper 25
Oct. 24, 2021
Mark 10:46-52

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me.
“The Jesus Prayer”

In our gospel story today we encounter Bartimaeus a blind beggar. There are a few things unique about him.

1. He is an unlikely disciple. His desperation as a blind beggar reminds us of the hemorrhaging woman. Long term suffering and exclusion from society bring a profound desperation of need. As in her story, the people close to Jesus are discouraging him from getting close. This would be the insiders and even the disciples. Is this an effort to protect Jesus from being overwhelmed? Or perhaps will the stigma of a beggar be negatively projected to those on the way?

Unlike the wealthy man from a few weeks past who cannot part with his material treasures to follow Jesus, Bartimaeus is portrayed as a model of Christian discipleship as he casts aside his cloak which most probably

represents his most treasured possession. In his act of throwing off his cloak, we see the image of one who leaves his former life behind.

This should give us pause in our present day to consider where we fall in as followers as well, checking in on our behavior of judgement, prejudice, and assumption. Taking time to move into that scene could be a fruitful Ignatian exercise in and of itself.

2. As an outsider and one of the marginalized, Bartimaeus has an insight knowledge that even the disciples did not have. How can we understand this from the reading? The blind man uses several titles for Jesus:

- Jesus of Nazareth
- Son of David
- Rabbouni- used as a title of honor

This point to his familiarity with Jesus, his lineage, his name, is astounding. Conscious to Bartimeus or not, he will join the throngs of those who will join the upcoming ***procession on the way*** who will welcome Jesus with the words, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our

ancestor David. The disciples themselves do not have the insight Bartimeaus does as a blind man, to see and comprehend who this Jesus is.

3. His prayer to Jesus has left a lasting spiritual legacy in an ancient mystical prayer well known by Eastern Christians and in use since the time of the Apostles. This prayer (called the Jesus Prayer) has spoken to women and men of all races, beliefs and creeds who seek to experience God. It was taught to me in 2003, and left dormant for 6 years until it inserted itself back into my life during a traumatic event).

“ Lord Jesus Christ, Have Mercy on me a Sinner” aka “The Jesus Prayer”.

In the Eastern Christian tradition, union with God is the goal for everyone. The purpose of this life is to be saturated with the life of Christ from which everything flows. The idea is that God will fill people with his Son’s life and they will accomplish **his work** in the world as opposed to people setting out to do things *for* God under their own steam which can lead to failure, disappointment, conflict and wasted effort. ¹

¹ Frederica Mathewes-Green The Jesus Prayer - The Ancient Prayer that tunes the heart to God. pg. 12

The persistence of Bartimaeus sets in motion a wave of mercy, blessing, and change. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus for mercy. **“Jesus, Son of God, Have mercy on me!**” Jesus then calls him, not directly, but through the crowds who had just separated them. They exclaim “take heart!, get up! He is calling you.!” In this way **both** Bartimaeus and the crowd have a conversion experience.

Physical sight is restored alongside spiritual sight. All are redirected towards assimilating the presence of God through Jesus. The process of assimilating the presence of God is called **theosis; Theos** -meaning “God” is like a cloth soaking up water by osmosis, we are saturated with God through theosis. The indwelling presence heals, restores, and completes us , preparing each of us to take the role in his kingdom that we alone can fill. ²

Jesus’ call breaks their hearts open. In this way then, a call is never to an individual but to community. ³ Those who once enjoined him not to bother Jesus of Nazareth are transformed. They are no longer speaking sternly to him. They in fact become witnesses and vessels of mercy. ⁴

² *Ibid*

³ Sermons that Work Pentecost 22B. Canon Rev. Whitney Rice 2021

⁴Lincoln Galloway Feasting on the Word Pentecost 22

Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus does not assume the obvious. Bartimaeus remarks” Let me see again”.

This restoration is immediate. He immediately becomes one of Jesus’ followers.

Progress in theosis is a gift from God, not won by any effort. However, you can make yourself available to such a blessing by practicing this prayer as a spiritual practice.

In my own life, this prayer, came into my presence unsought and unearned after it was taught to me six years prior (2003) by my spiritual mentor. By that I mean I was an ***accidental tourist***. As such, I am standing here today. Without this prayer experience, I would not be here. In great confusion and trauma, I sought out its meaning. This story is reflected in a piece I was asked to create, entitled , ***“The Jesus Prayer, Laboratory notes from an Accidental Tourist.”***⁵ This personal spiritual autobiography is too lengthy to present in a Sunday sermon, yet it is a profound story of personal transformation that today I can largely credit Bartimaeus with!

⁵ Rev. Betsy Sentigar “*The Jesus Prayer, Laboratory notes from and Accidental Tourist*. - Presentation November 9, 2014. North Presbyterian Church. Elmira, NY

At first, the prayer is just a string of words that repeat, nine words, perhaps mechanically in the mind. With time and practice, it may descend to the heart. As it does, there is a call to be attentive to it, to maintain it continually thereby bringing the mind into the heart. This prayer, treasured in Christian tradition more than 1500 years ago became translated in Europe in 1925, giving Western Christianity its first encounter⁶ from its origins from the desert mothers and fathers in the 5th century. Hence, ***prayer of the heart*** refers to the action of the prayer, something that occurs within the person with God's grace.

In my most weakened hour of loss and suffering and to my ignorant and foolish resistance, this prayer broke through to my heart which I continually profess was unsought, this prayer became the energizing force of God's love to this person who has ceased to function in the particularity of my house fire trauma. I was able to focus and function if I could relax and allow the prayer to cycle in myself. To deny or let go of it resulted in my psychological collapse.

In all of this narration, to conclude, I wish to say that as God is in all creation. He is embodied in the physicality of everything to include us as finite human beings and the situations in which we find ourselves. As Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What can I do for you?"

⁶ Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer - Ibid*

Jesus asks us the same...as a church, Christ Church, What do you want me to do for you? Our focus and attentiveness together on this question is the seedbed of our future here. Our response together becomes our faith, our wholeness and our discipleship.

“Rabbouni! Let us see!”

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

7