

WESTMINSTER CHURCH
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5
*“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”*

March 21st, 2021
5th Sunday of Lent

...We Gather to Worship God...

Call to Worship:

Take heart! For we are gathered in the Father’s presence to proclaim the wonders of the Lord.

Get up! For we are beckoned by the Son of David to respond to grace undeserved.

God is calling us! For we are united by the Spirit to follow Jesus on the way.

Come, let us worship God.

Hymn: Above All (Paul Baloche) https://youtu.be/LtJK5oqAh_8

Prayer

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Lord, we are gathered in your presence to stand side by side with those who have gone before us, who have lived the mystery of your grace and responded by following you on the way.

May your Holy Spirit guide us as we follow you to the places that you are calling your church to be.

Merciful God, our thoughts and deeds too often do not reflect the grace you show us.

Our speech and actions too often do not proclaim your salvation.

Forgive us, Lord, for the sins that we bear both as individuals and as your Church.

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.

Our teacher, let us see again!

Give us the courage to take heart in your grace.

Give us the strength to get up.

Give us the wisdom to hear your calling.

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us and hear us when we pray...

Our Father who art in heaven . . .

...We Listen to God's Word...

Word of God:

New Testament: Mark 10:46-52

Hymn: 769 "Lord of light, whose name and splendor"

<https://youtu.be/rWOc6VwVPII>

Message: One man's Palm Sunday

Some background for today's passage should help our understanding of the depth of this story in the movement of Jesus towards the Cross. This is the last miracle healing that Christ will do before his Crucifixion. For Jesus, the end of the road is not far away. Jericho was only about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Passover is coming. Jesus and his disciples are travelling up from the Jordan River, through the Judean countryside towards Jerusalem. Today they are passing through Jericho.

When a distinguished Rabbi or important teacher was on such a journey it was the custom for the people to come to the roadside and surround him, and listen to him while he talked to his disciples and followers. It was a way to transmit your teachings to the widest possible audience.

It was the law that every male Jew who was over 12 years old and who lived within a 15 mile radius of Jerusalem to go to Passover each year. It was clearly not possible to do this every year, so those who were unable to go would line the streets of towns and villages through which groups of pilgrims were travelling to wish them well on their journey. It was a vicarious form of participation in the high holy days of their people and their faith. So as our text tells us the streets of Jericho would be lined with people, there would be more than usual as this was Passover, and many would be curious to catch a glimpse of this audacious Galilean who had already tweaked the nose of the high and mighty.

Jericho also had one special characteristic. There were attached to the Temple in Jerusalem over 20,000 priests and as many Levites (members of the priestly class). They could not all serve at the temple at the same time, so they were divided into 26 groups which served in rotation. Many of these priests and Levites lived in Jericho (bedroom community) when they were not on active temple duty. There would have been many of them in the crowd that day. On the day of Passover itself all priests would be needed in Jerusalem, it was the rare opportunity where all got a chance to serve. But many would not have started their journey yet. There would be many hostile eyes in the crowd that day knowing that the man was coming who they knew had said 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'(Mark 14:58)

In the midst of this large and imposing scene sits a blind beggar man with the last name of Bartimaeus. A blind man with nothing to lose. Unless someone takes him to Jerusalem he is not getting there. Even if he got there because of his blindness he would not be welcomed at the Temple. Again, he is a blind man with nothing. He must rely on the charity of those who see him as in some way, the author of his own misfortune. John's gospel reports the question of the disciples to a similar individual "Teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

And yet Blind Bartimaeus may have been cut from a different cloth. Maybe you know someone that the world has fallen upon and yet they remain unbroken in the midst of the rubble. That though the world has tried it has not succeeded in robbing the person of their God given spark of self worth. I wonder if this is what Blind Bartimaeus is made of, because his cry of Son of David, have mercy on me is yes, a cry for help, but it is also a political cry. On the one hand the allusion to David is one that would bring to mind a much earlier triumphal entry of David into Jerusalem. In 2nd Samuel 6 King David returned the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem...remember this is where he danced naked before the Lord. The Son of David cry was a reminder of when it was really good to be Jewish in Israel....King David's rule, Solomon after him brought back such hopeful, longing for a better world again, no exile, no dark times, no famines, and no foreign powers. The Messianic cry of the return of the King..... brought back hope of a new Golden Age.

As well, the region of Judea is more nationalistic than the northern region of Israel. Son of David is an affirmation that Jesus has messianic characteristics

to his nature, that though the rabbis, and Levites completely downplay and disparage his authenticity—called him Satan a few days ago-- to Blind Bartimaeus Jesus has a legitimate messianic nature to him. In a very real way Blind Bartimaeus is already beginning the Triumphal Entry of Jesus a day ahead of time...here is one man already beginning the cry that will soon be heard at the gates of Jerusalem. Hosanna, Hosanna blessed is the coming kingdom of our Father David, Hosanna in the highest". To the priests and Levites gathered in the same crowd, a gauntlet has been thrown. Please note that Jesus does not correct Bartimaeus.

All of this is an important furthering of Mark's gospel. Remember at the beginning of this series I opened by drawing attention to the fact that no one is allowed to declare Jesus as the Son of God until after he dies on the cross, that the few examples of those who get it are told by Jesus to say nothing. But notice that there is a continuing "build up" of evidence and a growing sense of excitement and expectation among the people. There's an increasing push, an impetus that we can see in the movement of the text...and then it stops.

It stops at the cry of one lonely voice. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. One lonely voice, a voice from as low on the social scale as you could get...stops this parade because it stops Jesus in his tracks. It is tremendously impressive to see Jesus turn his attention from the many, from the momentum of the large crowd...because of one beggar.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem...he has "set his face" towards Jerusalem...this is the movement to the end of his mission, his ministry and his life.... Jesus is determined to fulfil the will of his Heavenly Father, to be offered up as a willing sacrifice for the sins of the world, to save the world. And Jesus stops for Bartimaeus.

There is something truly deep here. Evidence of a cosmic truth from eons past that undergirds the entire message of our faith in God and is brought forward in real time in Mark's gospel today. The importance of the one to God. The importance of the individual in the presence of the Most High God. Remember an early question in the Psalms (8) "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

There's a message here for those who like to think of the big picture, the large

crowd, the big event. Those who think in terms of multitudes and quantities. More and more we seem inclined to settle all our questions in terms of mass opinion polls. The individual easily gets lost, particularly when he sits, like Bartimaeus did, on the lowest rung of the social and religious ladder, on the side of a dusty road. The value which Jesus gives to one person in need is itself one of the greatest needs to know in our day. And in Christ's church anywhere and everywhere this picture of Jesus comes with a special compulsion. The one can be lost in the many in a congregation just as easily as in a large crowd. You can be blind in a pew and deaf in the pulpit to the need of the one, the broken, the lonely. This message is one to every congregation everywhere and anytime to be aware of and attentive to the need of every soul to be valued and recognized no matter where they are on the social ladder.

And finally to the one, to the broken, the injured, the hurting, the disappointed...you matter...you matter. God is never so big that you don't matter. Your needs are never so small as to be unimportant to the movement of God's will. In fact, you need to see here that your healing is a part of God's will...which is why Jesus stopped...stopped to heal one blind beggar on his way to the cross. You and I need to know at all times that the cry, no matter how small it is, Jesus, have mercy on me....will always be heard and will always be important to the movement of the will of God. Call on Jesus in your need, and He will stop, and He will call you to him and He will heal you and you will be able to follow him

...We Respond in Service...

Collection & Dedication

Let us present to God our tithes and offerings. (At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to office@westminsterchurch.ca. You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and monetary support of our mission at Westminster.)

Prayers of the People:

Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy upon us!

So many days, we feel we are like blind beggars, sitting on the side of the road hoping to hear the sounds of your coming. Or like the Canaanite woman begging for the crumbs that fall from your table. Or like the woman who was sick for so many years who reached out to touch the hem of your garment.

Jesus Christ, Son of David, have mercy upon us!

Have mercy upon us when we cannot see how we will make it,

Have mercy upon us when we are sick and cannot get well,

Have mercy upon us when life hardens our hearts and makes it difficult for us to love, to heal or to forgive,

Have mercy upon us when persecution comes and when we are misunderstood.

Jesus Christ, Son of David, we came this morning asking for strength to get to the other side, and grace to represent you well.

We came, confident that your promise to be with us always is true, confident that you are greater than the trials we face, confident that we are secure in the palm of your hands.

We came to you today, like blind Bartimaeus who sat on the side of the road to Jericho, knowing that you love us and have not forgotten our needs.

Jesus Christ, Son of David, as we go from here this morning, having heard of your mercy to Bartimaeus may we know it is ours as well to give to others we know in need of your grace. Lord Jesus grant us your peace. Amen.

Hymn: 626 “Lord of all power”

Benediction

Now as you go from here, may the grace, mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.