

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
October 28, 2018  
Pentecost 23  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 59:1-19  
Psalm 13  
Hebrews 5:12-6:12  
Mark 10:46-52

Our Gospel lesson today finds Jesus and his disciples leaving Jericho and heading toward Jerusalem. Jesus has warned the disciples three times now in Mark's Gospel that this is how things would play out, that he must go to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die. And so Jesus and the disciples now begin their final ascent to Jerusalem, going two thirds of a mile vertically over the course of about 18 miles. Even the geography here reminds us that the way of the cross is arduous.

Just as Jesus and the disciples depart, they encounter a man who Mark presents to us as a prime example of discipleship. (This is in contrast to James and John, who came to Jesus and asked for seats of power in his kingdom.) He is a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Mark tells us that Bartimaeus is sitting "along the way" soliciting alms from travelers who are making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

Hearing that Jesus is approaching, Bartimaeus cries out to him: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." The title "Son of David" was a title for the Messiah. Most Jews believed that the Messiah would be a new David, who, like

David, would make war on the nations oppressing Israel, pacify the land, and establish a kingdom.

Here, by calling Jesus the “Son of David,” it’s as if Bartimaeus understands Jesus’ identity. He *sees* the reality of who Jesus is, even though he is blind, whereas the disciples still struggle to see, even though they have their physical sight.

Earlier in Mark’s Gospel we encounter what scholars call the “Messianic Secret,” where Jesus instructs people to keep quiet about his identity. But here, Jesus does not silence Bartimaeus regarding the title he gives to him; instead, Jesus proceeds to make his way to Jerusalem where his entrance into the city will be full of Messianic symbolism. So much for the Messianic Secret.

As Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus, the crowd tries to shut him up. It’s a bit ironic, because his voice is all that Bartimaeus has left. Being blind, he cannot really push or fight his way through the crowd like the woman does earlier in Mark’s Gospel who is suffering from the blood disorder. But, like the woman, Bartimaeus persists. Jesus stops, and says, “Bring him here.”

The crowd says to him, “Cheer up, he’s calling you.” The Greek renders the crowd’s words as: “Take heart; *rise up*, he is calling you.”

In Mark’s Gospel, this word “rise” always calls to mind the resurrection, to which all miracles ultimately point, because it’s Jesus’ resurrection that is the

source of all healings. In being told to “rise up,” it’s as if Jesus is calling Bartimaeus to wholeness like he will one day call all of the faithful dead to wholeness.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants him to do for him, just as he asked James and John a bit earlier. But unlike James and John, who have been *blind* to what Jesus has been trying to show them, Bartimaeus wants to *see*. He says, “Teacher, I want to see.” The word “Teacher” here is the word *Rabboni*, which in Jewish literature was only used as a direct address to God.

Jesus responds to Bartimaeus with the same words he used with the bleeding woman: “Go your way. Your faith has healed you.” And Mark tells us that immediately he could see. And he follows Jesus down the road.

Mark’s language here is discipleship language. “Follow” and “down the road,” or more accurately rendered, “along the way.” Bartimaeus has now departed from the sidelines. He is no longer “alongside” the way. He now has joined Jesus “on the way.” It is the way of discipleship. It is the journey to Jerusalem. It is the way of the Cross.

Bartimaeus is a symbol of his captive people that Jesus has come to save and deliver. All his life has been sown in tears and weeping. But now, he reaps a new life.

Bartimaeus can also be a sign for us. How often Christ passes us by, in the person who is poor, in the person who is oppressed and seeking justice, in the disguise of a troubled family member, or a burdened co-worker – and yet we don't see him or hear him.

As we come to the Table this morning, we do so as those who constantly need God's grace to help us to see and discern the presence of Jesus in our midst and in our world. We need grace not only to help us see *who Jesus is*, but also to follow him *where he is going*. We can do neither without his supernatural assistance.

So we come with faith, and with the prayer that we might walk alongside him as he makes his way to Jerusalem.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.