

Healed, He Followed 2021
 Psalm 143:1-2, 7-11 Mark 10:46-52

Psalm 143:1-2, 7-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me, or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit. Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Save me, O Lord, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life. In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.

Mark 10:46-52 (New Revised Standard Version)

They came to Jericho. As he 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 sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they 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, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

A retired pastor and friend sent me an article about a recent survey of Presbyterian pastors in which more than half reported feeling **increasingly discouraged, defeated and burned-out this year.**

And I thought, well yes, but so too are teachers, medical workers, EMS, businesses and probably almost everyone else.

This ongoing season of Covid had taken a toll on all of us –everybody- we're all feeling a bit more stressed, cranky and weary with it all.

Our kids, trying to catch-up after a lost year of online classes with Covid has been very difficult and frustrating for them.

Senior citizens in lockdown, a hard year of loneliness, fear & loss.

For all of us, health and economic concerns, turmoil and uncertainty, and there's not much we could do to change our circumstance in life.

Reflecting on our struggles and the difficulties we face brings to mind an image of Bartimaeus of our Mark passage, sitting alone in the dust along the Jericho road, blind and impoverished, helpless and powerless.

This event at Jericho was near the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, so by now his mercy and his power to heal were quite well known.

Surely Bart was aware of the healing and miracle stories about Jesus, and so he takes action when he heard that the Lord coming his way, **for he could see well enough to imagine something better in life.**

In those days, there was little sympathy for those who were blind

since blindness was interpreted as having been cursed by God,
so Bartimaeus had a hard, difficult and unpleasant life.

Try to imagine yourself living Bart's life and prospects. vs., 46-47.

As he 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!"

This passage has more going on than just the events themselves,
for Jericho was the last stop before Jerusalem / the Passion.

Son of David, a specifically Old Testament Royal or messianic title,
indicating a descendant of King David, the promised Messiah.

In Mark, this passage immediately precedes the Triumphant Entry,
when the King of Kings entered Jerusalem, the city of David...
... a subtle bridge leading toward the events of the Passion.

The name, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, in Aramaic,
'bar' means 'son' and the word 'timeous' means 'honor' or 'value'
so "Bar + Timaeus" means 'son of honor' someone who is special,
a valued and precious child of great promise and potential.

But something terrible and tragic has happened.
Bartimaeus - valued child of promise and honor
has become a blind beggar by the side of the road.

This is a picture of loss, brokenness and troubled circumstance,
somehow something in life had terribly – tragically gone wrong.
When confronted by our troubles, losses and difficulties,
discouraged, sometimes we may start to think too small,
and don't factor in God's power & promises into our life-equations.

How many times have we lost our courage, tenacity and confidence?,
and so we surrendered and given up hope?, and settled for
far less than the promise of God's abundance and rich blessings?
- **as if** Almighty God were not still in charge
- **as if** the God who loves us, would ever abandoned us
- **as if** God's promises and power cannot really be trusted

Effective prayer and faithfully useful discipleship
begins when we trust the Lord Jesus, his grace and promises enough
to speak the truth and we honestly acknowledge that we need help,
as in, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

True prayer of discipleship is more about relationship than spoken words.
It is about open and honest heart to heart authentic conversation.

**It's about us getting connected with the will and purpose of God,
and not instructing God or convincing God how to do it our way.**

In Psalm 143, authentic prayer is well described, vs. 1 & 8

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness.
Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to
you I lift up my soul.

Prayer is about God's faithfulness, righteousness and steadfast love --
--- putting my trust in who the Lord God is, and not in myself,

while waiting in humility for God to reveal and guide me --
 - not assuming that God will enact the plan that I have worked out.

In the story, the crowd tries to silence Bartimaeus, vs. 48

Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

**A man desperately is crying out in desperation for help --
 and the voice of this world is trying to shut him up.**

The world tells us: - we are too insignificant and unworthy
 - that the problem is too large and difficult
 - that it's a consequence and we deserve it
 - that our prayer request is too trivial

I've heard some people say that some things are too trivial,
 too self-serving or inappropriate **to mention in prayer**—
 - but that's not true or consistent with Scripture,
 because God is always willing to hear us out & wants to hear it all.

Now I don't necessary sing the doxology or yell "praise the Lord"
 every time I find a good parking space near the mall entrance,
 but I don't think God objects anytime I feel like saying, "Thanks"...

... for if God tracks sparrows and knows the number of hairs on my head,
 then is there anything I shouldn't be able to bring before God,
 who does know me fully and who loves me completely anyway?

We can get so wrapped up with the right religious and holy words,
 that we forget we're talking to an infinite someone who
 already knows all our wounds & failings, and still loves us.

**Our task in prayer is to come before God as openly-honestly as we can,
 and let nothing dissuade or get in the way between us and the Lord.**

There's a scene in the movie *Bruce Almighty* in which God asks Bruce what he wants, and he answers
 "world peace." God says, "That's what you pray for when you're running for Ms. America. What is it you
 really want? What's going on in your life – let me in on it."

With tears in his eyes Bruce says, "I want you to care for my girlfriend because I really love her and I
 want the best for her." And God says, "Now that's a prayer – it came from your heart."

Continuing with Mark, as it turns out the crowd was wrong.
 This is important, notice that Jesus **noticed and cared about Bart**.
 Jesus had interest, compassion and valued this blind beggar,
 a man everyone else considered an unworthy & noisy nuisance.

Jesus did want to hear what Bartimaeus was saying, vs. 49-50.

Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they 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.

Jesus said, "call him here to me",
**and surely that is the principle task and mission the Church,
 to call, welcome and facilitate people coming to the Lord...**

**... as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread to eat,
 as one sinner telling another sinner where to find grace.**

So as a church, may we never be so set, cynical or frozen in place,
 or locked into religious structures, traditions and understandings

that we would ever silence or block someone away from Jesus.

It is also significant that Bartimaeus threw off his cloak,
which infers and suggests his eager enthusiasm and commitment
in throwing off any encumbrance against rushing to Jesus.

So too we may need to discard any obstacles that get in our way
that interfere with our authenticity and commitment in prayer,
which could include harboring rancor or resentment toward someone,
a persistent or on-going sin that we refuse to give up and repent.

Prayer & discipleship are hindered by things we hold onto too tightly
anything over and above a faithful and obedient walk with Christ,
for God how can God do work in our lives when we reject his grace?

**Like Bart's cloak, we need to throw off everything that distracts,
anything we place above faithful and obedient discipleship
or that keeps us from proclaiming the Good News of Christ.**

With the unencumbered Bartimaeus standing before him, Jesus asks,
vs. 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" ...
... which may sound like a strange and obvious question
for someone who can heal to ask someone who is blind.

Nevertheless it is an important question, a critical question,
because sometimes we humans seek and pursue the wrong goals,
sometimes we set our sights and hopes far too low and too small.

Bartimaeus might have asked Jesus just for alms, a few coins,
for just a little pocket change to survive another day,
just enough to make his life a bit easier for a while.

But Bartimaeus was bold and courageous, "My teacher, let me see again."

**And by his faith, in prayer he participated with the Divine,
as by his openness to the healing power of God through Jesus
his sight was fully restored and he followed Jesus. vs. 52**

Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. (i.e. he became a disciple)

In this story, faith means being open to the healing power of God.
Bartimaeus answered Jesus with exactly what we wanted and needed.
He told Jesus the truth about what was going on in his life.
No pretext that all was OK, or that he had it under control...

... he trusted Jesus enough to be honest, bold, open and forthright,
as we in our prayer can present our true feeling and words ----
--- even if they don't sound impressive, holy or righteous-
**- and that is the way we can be authentic & true in our life of prayer,
which leads toward faithful, obedient and useful discipleship.**

One of the important ways that followers of Jesus Christ
differ from our neighbors who do not know and walk with God,
**is how through the eyes of faith we can trust and proclaim
that our loving & gracious God is working toward our good
even amid the difficult circumstances of this world.**

By faith we believe and trust

that God is intimately involved in this world and in our lives.

By faith we believe and trust

that God can and does change situations and the course of events,
and that grace brings wonderful new possibilities
for the struggling & wounded to find healing and hope.

By faith we believe and trust

that the Lord God invites us to participate, through prayer
in the Lord's divine will and work, healing & saving purpose,
to receive the fullness of life & light for which we were created.

By faith we believe and trust

that God desires & invites us into a real relationship with him,
the same way that we build our human relationships
with time, experience and talking about things together...
for that is the process and task of prayer.

Jesus did care and Jesus did call Bartimaeus 'son of honor'
who responded, who was healed, who then followed Jesus.

The lesson is, that Jesus continues to notice, to hear and to heal.

Prayer brings us into God's presence, even if not done perfectly.

Today, right now, we have a choice, for we are in his Presence.

We could just continue to get by, complacent in quiet desperation,
and allow other voices to silence and muffle our cries for help.

We could settle for a mere handful of coins,

for far less than the full blessings & hope of healing and grace,
less than the full abundance of life that our God intends for us,

**or we could risk radical transformation and reformation,
the scary discomfort of God bringing disruptive change--
- something totally unexpected, unfamiliar, unusual and new.**

The call is to claim God's promise and power to make us whole,
and to follow in faith and hope, wherever the Master leads

**and risk significant change and transformation,
which is the true healing of following him afresh.**

Jesus is asking us to pray, and he wants our prayers to be authentic.

So what is it that we really want, what do we most care about?

What is going on in our lives, and what is most important to us?...

... for Jesus continues to ask, "What do you want me to do for you?"

The question is, how will we answer, how will we respond?

Will we invite Jesus to reign, to heal and to make us whole,
and have we the courage to follow in trust **wherever Jesus leads?**

My experience is that effective prayer is **a partnership in faith,**

between the infinite power,

grace, goodness, compassion and understanding of God,

and our commitment, desire and willingness to follow

with our best in faithful and continuing obedience.

The psalmist has it right, vs. 1, 8, 10

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness. Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. O Lord, preserve my life.