

TRINITY 21/ORD 30

Jer 31:7-9

Heb 5:1-6

Mk 10:46-52

The phrase, "There's none so blind as those who will not see," is a paraphrase by Jonathan Swift of Jeremiah 5:12 and it sums up today's readings. Jeremiah told God's people, including the blind, lame, and nursing mothers, who were returning to their homeland from exile in Babylon, to rejoice because God has revealed himself as a loving and merciful father to his people. The glory of God's people is being restored, Jeremiah assures them, so their sorrow will be turned into joy. Jeremiah's message was one of hope for the future.

The theme of hope is also found in the gospel reading. It is the last healing miracle recorded in St Mark's gospel. Jesus, God's Suffering Servant and High Priest is walking from Jericho to Jerusalem, a journey of about 28 kms, where he will make another attempt to call God's people to recognise that his Kingdom was very near.

Bartimaeus, a blind beggar was by the roadside but his blindness meant that he could not see Jesus so he shouted, using a title of the Messiah, "Son of David, have pity on me." Because he was blind he was deemed to be a sinner so the crowd assumed that Jesus would not be interested in him. They told him to shut up, so of course he shouted even louder. Bartimaeus couldn't see, but unlike the crowd he recognised who Jesus really is. Jesus stopped and told the crowd to bring Bartimaeus to him. Bartimaeus got up and threw away his cloak that he used to gather alms and unlike the rich man whose riches prevented him becoming a disciple, Bartimaeus approached Jesus empty handed and open hearted.

Jesus asked him the very same question that St Mark tells us he asked James and John, namely, "What do you want me to do for you?" James and John asked for status and power by being seated next to Jesus at the heavenly banquet. Bartimaeus asked for God to show mercy and restore his sight. St Mark's gospel is written through the lens of the prophet Isaiah and in Isaiah blindness and sight are linked to unfaithful and faithful responses to God's Covenant with Israel.

Bartimaeus received his physical sight because he possessed spiritual insight, and his response was to follow Jesus along the way to Jerusalem. There Jeremiah's promise of a new Covenant between God and his people, Jews and Gentiles, male and female, disabled and sinners alike, was announced during the Last Supper, delivered and sealed with Christ's blood on the Cross and ratified through his Resurrection. Bartimaeus' response to his healing was to follow Jesus along the road of discipleship and suffering.

Up to this point in St Mark's gospel, Jesus has had more success in restoring physical blindness than spiritual blindness. The restoration of Bartimaeus' physical sight demonstrates that spiritual blindness can also be reversed. Anyone and everyone can become a true disciple of Jesus.

Like the Jews returning home to Jerusalem with hope and joy, so Mark wants us to understand the story of Bartimaeus as one of hope because the true restoration between God and his people was to take place in Jerusalem.

Let's be honest, we all suffer from some level of spiritual blindness. Some of the Church's leaders are blind guides like the Pharisees were. All of us can be lukewarm in our faith, slack in our attendance at mass, lazy in our prayer life, confused about our belief and dismissive of inconvenient social teachings of the Church. The way of discipleship is a difficult and tortuous one so it is much easier to do what Simon and Garfunkel say in one of their songs, "And so, I'll continue to continue to pretend, My life will never end, And flowers never bend with the rainfall."

Jesus didn't pretend, the prophets didn't pretend, the saints didn't pretend, Bartimaeus didn't pretend and neither should we.

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