

Healing

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Mark 10: 46 - 52

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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 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.

It is in my serving this church that I've come to understand Jesus as a healer. Perhaps because there are so many of you in the healing business or because I think that your way of loving your pastors brings healing to a weary servant. Not a week goes by when I'm not asked with sincerity, "how are you?" Or perhaps it is the 12 steps which have shaped our 7 spiritual practices, one of which is having a mentor and letting someone pray for you. Or perhaps it is because of the many of you who turned out to pray for healing of those we loved and lost to this world.

I know it is a mystery that still troubles many of us...why are some physically healed and others not? Bishop Patrick Okabe from Uganda could have asked, why do some people struggle to have clean water to drink while others bathe in it? Instead he told us about the living bread, Jesus, who is all they and we need.

Healing is always part of the larger journey of faith, in life and through death. We who are so good at getting results, at fixing things, we can get so caught up in wanting someone to be completely free of disease or a world completely free of famine that we miss Jesus. Yet it is Jesus and the healing he brings that allows people to face the most frightening circumstances with courage that gives them freedom to live. Patrick reminded us of that last week: "when

we pray for our daily bread, we are praying for bread. And when we have none, we still have Jesus, the living bread." And, I will never forget Erin's dance in the Pacifica High School gym. Erin, once a Young American, was part of our church for many years and she left this world way too early. Still, in the midst of the disease, she continued to lift up her students and bring joy. It is the inner healing of our soul which enables us to freely live and die in love and hope. It is inner healing that allows us to move beyond that which blinds us to see our loving parent, our God.

Barbara sent me and some of you a video of a boy who had been born deaf. He experienced his mother's love, but had never experienced her voice expressing that love. At the age of 8 months, he received a cochlear implant, and was able to hear for the first time. On the video, before his mother even speaks, his head turns toward her. Then she calls his name. He stops sucking the pacifier. She continues calling his name and the pacifier drops from his mouth. And a few seconds later, hearing his name called once again, he squeals in delight. Healing is like that, it reminds us of the fullness of God's love.

My clearest understanding of Jesus as a healer comes out of the story of Bartimaeus. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to dying, when Bartimaeus calls from the roadside. Despite of where he is headed, Jesus is alive and aware. When he hears Bartimaeus' cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," he "stands still." And he says, "call him here."

Healing begins when what is broken is able to call out.

But often we pretend we aren't broken. We don't want to claim the parts of ourselves that have been hurt. We want to get over it, learn new patterns of living, and leave that damaged part of ourselves behind. Yet while the strong parts of ourselves are glad to lead Jesus where we think he needs to go, it is precisely the broken self that opens us to experience

the full love of Jesus.

Bartimaeus is an unwelcome sight for those who are travelling to meet God at the temple. They look away, hurry on, try to take no notice of him or any of those who line the street that day. Those who travel with Jesus are blind to his need and their own.

When Bartimaeus shouts out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” the crowd rebukes him. They sternly order him to “be quiet.” The Greek word behind “sternly order” is e-pe-te-mä’-o and is used in Mark most often for the deeds of power only Jesus can do. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus rebuked the wind on the stormy sea, “be still.” Bartimaeus is like a wild wind breaking into the followers structured, orderly, ‘sanctified’ world. Their reaction is to push him away with the same force of Jesus’ command, to pretend he isn’t there. Sickness seeks our silence.

It is the same reaction the disciples have when Jesus tells them that he must suffer and die and after 3 days be raised. When Peter hears this, he rebukes, e-pe-te-mä’-o, Jesus and Jesus angrily orders Peter to “get behind me Satan.” To erase the cross, to remain above or beyond suffering, is the way of the evil one. In such a path there can be no healing or power. Satan seeks our silence.

That which calls out from the road is neither wind nor rain, it is not a storm to be stilled or an ugliness to be forgotten; instead, it is a voice of the broken one who boldly calls out that Jesus might enter in and healing might begin. Without that voice...do we ever hear Jesus?

Healing begins, Jesus enters in, when what is broken is allowed to call out. Far from being a hindrance, it is the broken parts of ourselves given voice which propel us into the realm of God, and then to Jesus, seeking answer.

Hearing Bartimaeus’ voice, Jesus stands still.

Jesus doesn’t hurry away. He doesn’t try to quiet Bartimaeus. He stands still. He says, “call him here.”

The crowd comes alive. “Take heart, get up, he is calling you.” Suddenly they have stopped worrying about where they need to go, or the duties they must yet perform, instead they remembered...hey, we are with Jesus! It is like that when new people come into church or Bible Study. New member gatherings

are so uplifting because newcomers have an ability to express what we sometimes forget: Jesus is in our midst!

Healing happens on the road, it is part of our journey with Jesus. Jesus heals when we allow the broken parts of ourselves or others (when we allow Bartimaeus) space to call out to him. Seeing Jesus respond to another gives us reason to take heart, get up, and answer Jesus’ call anew.

So it is time to share a bit of my story. In January, I attended a Healing Prayer Conference. It was hard to go because to go was to admit I was in need of healing. I like to think of myself as the healer rather than the one in need of healing.

When the day came I spent time in the morning at the gym hoping the snow storm that caused Atlanta to close a few roads would make me unable to attend. No such luck.

The first moments of the conference were uncomfortable. I sang what felt like unending songs with people of faith who like to raise their hands in the air and wondered about what mental illness brought them and me here. I sat still during the teaching and it is humbling to admit, me who likes to believe the message is always important, I don’t remember what she spoke about. I do remember she was encouraging, asking us to enter into all the experiences offered. Being one who wants to get value for money, I was easily convinced. Spiritually, I understand sometimes we just have to be obedient.

So people prayed with/for me, other times I was on my own in a sea of those who were praying. It was in the first of these times of meditative prayer when I met Jesus. In the room where prayer ministers wandered placing their hands on the shoulders of people as the Holy Spirit led them and quiet music played, I lay down and allowed the broken part of me to call out. In my mind’s eye, I saw Jesus. He said he had something he wanted to show me. Did I want to come? Our scripture tells of how Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, sprung up, and, though blind, went right to Jesus. Well it wasn’t like that. I answered, “no, not really, but I will.”

I was concerned that what I’d see would be how I’ve failed or experience anew a memory of deep hurt. Indeed, Jesus took me back to my childhood, to times

when I was alone, times when I could have felt sorry for myself. And, instead, I was playing, imagining, making a world of adventure out of my backyard or the drainage ditch in the field that lay over the corner of the block wall of my home, tolerating the discomfort of bullies, and finding ways to make it through high school with a newly single mom and a brother who had demons of his own to fight.

Part of me struggles with the thought that I'm strange, an oddball, or, as Rachel now sometimes calls me, the "embarrassing one." This is the part of me that imagines that I'm not welcome and so struggles to reach out. It can be a problem for a minister who wants to share the gospel. As Jesus had me look upon these moments in my life, I saw the little girl I once was not as strange or embarrassing or one deserving of pity. Instead what filled my thoughts were these words: "See how creative and strong she is? See how she handles difficulty with compassion." I liked that girl I once was.

It was a watershed moment, changing my behavior even in the span of that day. Instead of having dinner on my own, instead of hiding under my cloak of "you're not wanted," I sprang up and asked a young couple out, and we had the best of times sharing stories.

Immediately, scripture says, Bartimaeus regained his sight and followed Jesus on the Way.

The experience, like this one, of receiving prayer has been so powerful for me over these 5 years that I've been compelled to ask people into my office that I might pray with and for them. It is where my healing has become a ministry and where I continue to see Jesus. Jesus always turns up. Each one of you is invited to enter in. Let's set up a time--you might as well get value out of your associate minister.

But even now there is an opportunity to enter further into the fullness of God's love, to hear the voice of Jesus.

Bartimaeus boldly cries out, Jesus stops, calls to him, and Bartimaeus throws off his cloak, springs up, and comes to Jesus. When he stands before Jesus, Jesus asks "what is it you want me to do for you?" Remember Jesus asked me, "Do you want to come with me?" Jesus doesn't force anything, he invites.

In your bulletin is the question Jesus asks of Bartimaeus. I invite you to take a pencil from the pew or from your bag, or simply close your eyes. As the Spirit leads give answer. When you come forward today for communion, you are coming to Jesus. Open yourself to what he wants to give to you.

Take a breath and imagine with me, if you will, the curious compassion in Jesus' eyes looking out of scripture into yours. What healing is part of your journey today? Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

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