

## The 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

October 28, 2018

The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, are known as the *Synoptic Gospels*. The word *synoptic* means “seeing all together”, because these 3 Gospels share many common stories, miracles and events drawn from Jesus’ life and teachings. These Gospels also share a common structure: we see Jesus begin his ministry around the Galilee region, before turning South, heading for Judea and the city of Jerusalem. All three Gospels, in fact, relate the moment when this event began:

**Matthew:** 19:1 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

**Mark:** 10:1 He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan.

**Luke:** 9:51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

Jesus follows the road taken by Jewish pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem in anticipation of the Jewish Passover, the ritual meal that memorialized their liberation from slavery in Egypt by Moses. Jesus, before his passion, death and resurrection, would also celebrate the Passover with his disciples in Jerusalem. However, Jesus gave the Passover a more perfect meaning when he identified himself as the new Passover lamb, that his followers would memorialize and actualize in perpetuity by means of bread and wine, in imitation of Jesus’ actions and words. Having then given us the means to perpetuate his Passover, Jesus then, through his suffering and death, becomes our Passover; not a Passover from slavery to liberation, but from death to life.

Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection await him as he proceeds through Jericho, which is the last city a pilgrim would travel through before arriving at Jerusalem. Jericho was only 46 kilometres, or 28 and a half miles from Jerusalem, which a physically fit pilgrim could cover in no more than two days. Jericho, therefore, reminded the pilgrim that they were now not far from their destination—Jerusalem. It is also in Jericho that Jesus performs the last healing miracle found in the Gospel of Mark.

Although Bartimaeus' healing of blindness was not that unusual, Jesus had healed others of blindness, this miracle does stand out. First, Bartimaeus is one of a few who were healed whose name is known by an Evangelist, an author of a Gospel. As Mark mentions Bartimaeus by name, it can be assumed that Bartimaeus was a member of the early Church and was known by other members of the Church.

Secondly, this healing miracle is granted Bartimaeus because of his deep faith. Although blind, he has spiritual insight that enables him to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, which is implied in the title Bartimaeus gives him, "Son of David". The religious scholar Paula Frederiksen describes Bartimaeus' use of the title "Son of David", about Jesus, as the first public acknowledgement of Jesus as the Christ (Meaning *Messiah*), following Peter's private confession of Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8:27-30). Bartimaeus recognizes Jesus as the "Son of David", not by means of physical sight, but by means of faith and spiritual insight.

Bartimaeus' faith is so strong that he boldly cries out to Jesus, even though others order him to be quiet. His faith will not be squelched by public proprieties. He has strong faith in Jesus Christ and he will proclaim it, regardless of what others think. Bartimaeus is an admirable reminder that our faith is meant to be shared. Through our baptism, we are called to proclaim the faith to others and not to keep it to ourselves because we are too shy or too embarrassed to share it. Bartimaeus' public proclamation of his faith eventually pays off, as Jesus calls for him.

Another detail that demonstrates the strength of Bartimaeus' faith is revealed as he throws off his cloak. Beggars had cloaks, which identified them as beggars. Beggars were not able to work, because of some disability, so they positioned themselves by a thoroughfare, calling out to passersby to give them a few coins to help them get through the day. The beggar's cloak would be one of their few possessions and would be their covering during the day and their blanket at night. Bartimaeus threw off his cloak because he knew, in faith, that he was throwing off his old life forever by going to Jesus. He believed that his encounter with Jesus was going to change him forever, beginning with the healing of his physical blindness.

Jesus' encounter with Bartimaeus provides a happy resolution, in comparison to the past two encounters Jesus has, as found in the Gospel readings from the Last

two Sundays. The question Jesus asks Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?”, is almost word-for-word the same question Jesus asked James and John in the Gospel Reading last Sunday. James and John replied to Jesus’ question by asking him to give them prestigious positions in his Kingdom, to which Jesus said, “You do not know what you are asking.” Jesus was right; the brothers request betrayed their ignorance of what was entailed in their discipleships. The brothers did not realize that their involvement in Jesus’ mission of proclaiming the Gospel would not give them honorary positions and prestige, but rather martyrdom for James and exile and incarceration for John. Fortunately, in time, the brothers understood the absurdity of their request as they came to understand the true nature of Christian discipleship. Eternal glory would be theirs, but not before they willingly struggled and suffered to build up the Kingdom of God here. That is why Jesus did not grant them their request.

With Bartimaeus, however, Jesus immediately grants him his request to be able to see again. Jesus grants his request because, unlike James and John, Bartimaeus knew what he was asking. He was asking that his physical sight be restored so that it could assist and supplement his spiritual insight, so that, with his physical sight on par with his spiritual insight, supported by his faith, he might be better able to follow Jesus along the way.

Another contrast found in the Gospel of Mark is that found between Bartimaeus and the rich young man, whose story was proclaimed in the Gospel Reading two Sundays ago. It is noted that, after Bartimaeus was cured of his blindness, he “followed Jesus on the way”. That cannot be said of the rich young man. When Jesus challenged him to “sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, then come follow me”, the man was not able to do this because he was attached to his possessions, or to put it bluntly, was a slave to his possessions. He walks away from Jesus, grieving, because he knew he couldn’t serve two masters—Jesus and his wealth. He is grieving the man he could have been, but cannot be, because of his attachments.

Bartimaeus’ strong faith response to Jesus offers a happy resolution to the earlier encounters between Jesus and the rich young man, and the brothers James and John. To some degree, the rich young man, and James and John were suffering from spiritual blindness. This blindness kept the rich young man from appreciating

the riches of the Kingdom of God that would come to him if he would only surrender his personal wealth. He couldn't see the bounty found in the Kingdom of God because his material wealth impeded his spiritual vision. James and John were blinded by the models of leadership around them, and by the tokens of power associated with these leaders, so they assumed it should be the same for them as Apostles. Jesus had to clear up their blighted vision by reminding them what discipleship for the sake of Kingdom of God really entailed: servanthood.

James, John and the rich young man's grasp of what God's Kingdom means pales in comparison to that of blind Bartimaeus. The irony that a blind man's insight into who Jesus is and what his Kingdom is about is the most accurate of the four shouldn't be lost to us. As Jesus proceeds to Jerusalem to fulfil his Father's will, with Bartimaeus beside him, he goes to be our Passover and our salvation. As Bartimaeus' faith helped him to recognize this in Jesus, so we, with the help of Bartimaeus, should come to recognize the same.