

Mark 10:46-52

As Jesus enters Jericho a blind man named Bartimaeus shouts out asking for Jesus to have mercy on him. Then Jesus calls the blind man, and asks him what he wants. When he answers that he wants to see, Jesus heals him, and he follows Jesus.

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.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” The word in Greek is “*eleison*,” which has become so deeply embedded in the liturgy of the church, *kyrie eleison*. Contrast Bar-Timaeus’ (son of Timaeus) approach to Jesus with that of the Zebedee brothers just a few verses earlier when they ask Jesus for a special place in his royal cabinet. But Bar-Timaeus simply begs for mercy. Everyone tells him to shut up. It’s unseemly to hear the cries of a beggar when a dignitary has come to town. Like many cities and towns in our own day, the homeless are rounded up and kept away when the community leaders want to leave a good impression on important guests. There is tremendous social pressure to stifle the cries of human pain and neediness. When people sink deeply into grief, they often hear the message, “Get over it!” When the poor and homeless make their presence known society wants to make them invisible. “Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’” Jesus’ ears are especially tuned to hear the *kyrie eleison* whenever and wherever it may be voiced. We are all beggars. We have no claim on Jesus other than that we are in deep and desperate need for his mercy. Jesus asks, “what do you want from me?” “My Teacher (*rabouni*), I want to see again.” The word “again” tells us something about Bar-Timaeus as well. At some point he could see, but now he is blind. It could have been as simple as cataracts or as severe as some eye disease. The point is that he once could see but is now blind. He is asking Jesus to reverse that. “Once I was blind, but now I can see,” as the old hymn says. Jesus says to Bar-Timaeus, “Go, your faith has made you well”, but as soon as his sight was restored, he “followed him on the way.” In other words, he became a disciple. He joined that group of disciples on their way to Jerusalem.

(Source: Leonard Vander Zee, Centre for Excellence in Preaching, Calvin Seminary)

COCU 62B Readings

There is no question, when faced with this week’s readings, that God is biased toward restoration. Every reading speaks about God’s restoring, saving work in some way. Job has a transforming encounter with God and is restored beyond the prosperity he had enjoyed before his trial. The Psalm celebrates God’s restoration from trouble. In Hebrews Jesus is portrayed as the one who intercedes for God’s people and who offered himself as the only necessary sacrifice. Finally, Bartimaeus receives his sight, which not only restores his vision, but also his life. The key to these stories, though, is that they are not just about restoration of circumstances, but are about restoration of relationships, especially with God. Ultimately this is the truth in all restoration stories. It can be comforting to have our outward circumstances restored, but it is when our hearts are restored, when we are delivered from the fear, self-protection, defensiveness, and isolation our brokenness or suffering has brought on us that we are truly saved. The challenge for us this week is to be people who find our restoration in relationship with God and others, and who, as we work for justice, remember the humanity of those we serve, bringing them into safe, healing relationships.

Global application: When we speak about justice, a lot of our language reveals a bias toward what has been called “retributive justice” – the “punishment” of offenders, and the restitution that “balances the scales” and “evens the score”. Yet God’s justice appears to be more biased toward “restorative justice” – making things whole and bringing about the healing of both perpetrator and victim, and of society as a whole. The role of community in this restoration cannot be over stated. If we are to view God’s justice in these restorative ways, then we cannot ignore the importance of the restoration of the heart, and of relationships. Those who have been punished by society for crimes, cannot become healthy contributing members of society without strong, supportive relationships. Those who have been marginalised through poverty, sickness or trauma, cannot find healing and a sense of security without protective and healing relationships. In every circumstance where we work to bring God’s restoration to others, we need to ensure that networks of relationships are provided. The church, of course, is the perfect place to create and nurture these relationships, which is why, when we allow ourselves to become retributive, we fail in our mission.

(Bible reading summaries and commentary by John van de Laar, Sacredise)

Psalm 34:1-8

A song of thanksgiving for God's restoration received when the Psalmist sought God. Though the righteous have troubles, God delivers them.

I will bless the Lord at all times;

God's praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the Lord;

let the humble hear and be glad.

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt God's name together.

**I sought the Lord, and God answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.**

Look to God, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord, and was saved from every trouble. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear God, and delivers them.

**O taste and see that the Lord is good;
happy are those who take refuge in God.**

The psalmist used his own varied life experiences to teach others to recognise God at work amongst the trials and gifts in life. He taught them these words: "...let all who are helpless take heart..." Why? Because the psalmist said: "...I prayed to the LORD, and God answered me. God freed me from all my fears. Those who look to God for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces. In my desperation I prayed, and the LORD listened; God saved me from all my troubles..." Psalm 34 is all about receiving from God, when in complete trust we cry to God for help. The psalm's message was not theory – it was real-life results from God. (Source: Joan Stott)

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

Job recognises that he had spoken without knowledge, and that he has now encountered God. Then God blesses Job beyond the prosperity he had at first.

Then Job answered the Lord: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known

him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days.

The reality of injustice in our world is so troubling that I don't fault anyone who cannot believe in God because of it. I have experienced a share of injustice in my life. And at times I've been angry and come close to giving up my faith. But the resolution to that crisis is found neither in giving up on God nor in the simplistic presumption that God won't let bad things happen to good people. It is found in continuing to believe in the God who is always there, the God who never abandoned Jesus, the God who never abandoned Job, and the God who will never abandon us, no matter what may come our way. God's justice is the justice of compassion. No matter what we may have to endure in this world, God is always right there with us, working in and through our lives to bring good out of every injustice. God's justice is found in God's faithful presence - God will never forsake us! (Commentary, Alan Brehm, *The Waking Dreamer*)

Hebrews 7:23-28

Jesus is an eternal priest who constantly prays for God's people. He doesn't need to offer sacrifices every day because he offered himself once and for all.

Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.