

BE ENCOURAGED! GET UP! HE'S CALLING YOU

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So, what do I say THIS time? I began serving this congregation in 2010.

11 times in those 8 years, I have had the . . . challenge . . .

of chucking the sermon that I wrote earlier in the week

to reflect on some new event of gun violence

and to do so in the context of faith in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Frankly, I don't have anything new to say.

I disagree entirely with the news reports from Pittsburgh

that claim the nation is "shocked" and "stunned"

by yesterday's massacre of 11 praying people in the Tree of Life Synagogue.

No, Americans are NOT shocked and stunned by this gun violence.

We are no longer surprised. We may be glad it wasn't here,

but other than that, we're almost numb to these reports.

If we are not very careful, Americans will soon be resigned to violence.

One of the most logical observations about life that I make, and I make it often,

is that every system is perfectly designed to get the results it's already getting.

The system we have now for dealing with random violence by "bad guys"

is to mete out even more calculated violence by "good guys":

by police, by armed guards, by capital punishment.

The system we now have will keep getting us what we've got.

Violence. Unrelenting, perpetual, unsurprising violence.

Do we really want it that way?

Are we just going to resign ourselves to this system?

What do you think Jesus would do? Be resigned to violent systems?

In yet another intersection of a 2,000-year-old story with today's newspapers,

today's gospel lesson is about God's eternal way versus our way today.

Jesus is on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem, a walk of about 18 miles,

an easy day's journey for people who walk a lot, as Jesus and the disciples do.

Shortly after today's story, Jesus will arrive in Jerusalem

and will ask his friends to fetch him a donkey to ride into the city

in that procession we know as Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week.

In other words, less than a week after Jesus talks to Bartimaeus,

Jesus will be dead, condemned by priests, and executed – perfectly legally –

under the Roman criminal justice system.

Western civilization adopted a lot from the Roman Empire, including the idea

that to get rid of trouble, eradicate troublemakers; Jesus was a troublemaker.

Jesus has already told his disciples 3 times that this is what will happen,

that's how predictable the system is. But all that comes later.

Today, a big crowd is walking on the road with Jesus.

Blind Bartimaeus is sitting in his usual spot by the side of the road,

begging for money from anybody and everybody so he can eat for another day.

Today's Collect and Scripture readings are at the end of the sermon text.

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Bartimaeus is such a nobody we don't even learn his own name.

He's just the son – *Bar* in Aramaic means *son* – of Timaeus.

He's a nobody, but he isn't hopeless, and he isn't resigned to his situation.

Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus using the most magnificent title for him:

Son of David. Son of the mightiest king of Israel, the one God favored,
the one who wrote or inspired all those psalms about God's justice,
about healing for the blind, the poor, the orphans, and the strangers.

Blind Bartimaeus is the first person to call Jesus the Son of David.

Bartimaeus cries out, and is summarily shushed by the crowd.

Pish. You're a loser, Bartimaeus. Stop bothering the important people.

But Bartimaeus will not be resigned. He will not be quiet.

He has this hope that maybe things can be different if he acts,
and he trusts his God, the God of justice and mercy, will hear him.

He cries out louder: *Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!*

The Son of David hears, and listens (they aren't the same thing),
and calls for the loser to come to him.

By his mere recognition of a nobody, Jesus begins to change things.

The crowd responds by saying to Bartimaeus, no longer a loser:

Be encouraged. Get up! He is calling YOU.

Bartimaeus throws off his coat – probably his most valuable possession,
just as Simon, Andrew, James and John threw off their fishing nets –
and, like them, immediately jumps up to go to Jesus' side.

Jesus gives Bartimaeus the ultimate dignity of ASKING him what he wants.

Again, Jesus doesn't impose, he listens.

Now, what would a poor person be likely to ask for?

What do they ask for standing in our intersections? Food? Shelter? Money?

Those are all things that will solve the blind man's problems for a while,
but Bartimaeus wants something life-changing and impossible: TO SEE.

He wants the very system he has lived with all his life to be upended.

He trusts that the God of David can and will open the eyes of the blind.

That's what "faith" means in Greek: trust. Utter, absolute trust.

Notice that Jesus never touches Bartimaeus.

This is unlike the healing of the blind man with "scales" in his eyes,
when Jesus spits in mud and applies it to the man's face.

Bartimaeus' blindness is of a different kind, a spiritual kind.

To be healed, Bartimaeus needs to trust, to have faith, in God's mercy.

It is this trust that heals Bartimaeus, that makes him healthy, whole, and holy.

As soon as his eyes are opened, Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way.

Did you know that the earliest label for followers of Jesus

was not *Christians* or even *church*, but *People of the Way*?

Bartimaeus now has sight he needs to leave everything and follow Jesus
on The Way, the Way that was taking Jesus straight to the cross to be crucified,
to be eradicated for bucking a system grounded in violence,
and the elitism, corruption, and oppression that always come with it.

The most remarkable thing about Bartimaeus, in my opinion,
is that he knew what was wrong with him. In that, he is far ahead of many of us.

His knew problem wasn't other people. (How many folks do you know
who are sure that ALL their problems are someone else's fault?)

It wasn't physical hunger or lack of money.

The problem was in himself. He needed to be changed. He was willing to change.

He refused to be resigned to the way things were,
to be complicit in his own oppression by the system;

he refused to be shushed, he refused to think of himself as a nobody
unworthy of God's care and transforming power

He cried out for God's mercy, for his life to be changed into an eternal life,
the Life of the Eternal One, the life we are meant to live ON EARTH.

Bartimaeus dared this because his Jewish faith taught him to hope,
hope as found in the prophecies of Jeremiah: that God's mercy and eternal life
are for everyone, even the losers and nobodies, the blind, the disabled,
vulnerable women and children.

ALL are to be welcomed home, ALL are beloved of God.

Bartimaeus' Jewish faith taught him to hope as expressed in the psalms.

The psalm today is the joyful song of the exiles
who suffered deportation, oppression and denigration for their religion.

These Jews, following the Way of God, are now coming home with joy.

Here in this place, we are Christians, taught the same hopes as Bartimaeus was.

Just so, we are also all just like Bartimaeus was;

each one of us here is spiritually blind, unable fully to be People of the Way.

Will we each dare to be honest with ourselves about what needs to be changed?

Our Christian faith teaches us to hope for more,

for the wholeness Bartimaeus found.

Will we, as he did, cry out for God's mercy, asking to be changed

so we, too, can live eternal life?

I predict that any change God effects will be a healing of one of just a few things:

it may be something that we fear, a visceral fear that we were carefully taught
about other groups, nations, or values, that is now an entrenched prejudice;

it may be an unpleasant or oppressive reality we resigned ourselves to long ago,
and now can't even imagine how anything could be different;

or it may be something that we actually don't WANT to let go of,

like the rich man from a couple of weeks ago, who had many possessions

and loved them so much he would not follow Jesus on The Way.

What is it in each of us that needs to be changed by our transforming God

to heal us from being resigned to a system of violence

that actively works against God's will for the earth,

God's will is for the justice, peace, love, joy, hope, holiness and wholeness

that is the Life of the Eternal One in heaven.

I cannot and will not answer that question for anyone but me.

There is only one person on this planet I can change,

as I beg for Jesus, Son of David, to have mercy and heal me.

The one thing that is different for all of us from our bother Bartimaeus

is that here in this place, no one seeking God's healing will be shushed.

Here in this place, everyone one seeking Christ's healing will hear:

Be encouraged. Get up! He is calling YOU.

So, what DO you want Jesus to do for you?

COLLECT OF THE DAY

Eternal light, shine in our hearts. Eternal wisdom, scatter the darkness of our ignorance. Eternal compassion, have mercy on us. Turn us to seek your face, and enable us to reflect your goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

JEREMIAH 31:7–9

The Lord proclaims: Sing joyfully for the people of Jacob; shout for the leading nation. Raise your voices with praise and call out: “The Lord has saved his people, the remaining few in Israel!”

I’m going to bring them back from the north; I will gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the disabled, expectant mothers and those in labor; a great throng will return here.

With tears of joy they will come; while they pray, I will bring them back. I will lead them by quiet streams and on smooth paths so they don’t stumble. I will be Israel’s father, Ephraim will be my oldest child.

PSALM 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.

Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed

Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses of the Negev.

Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

HEBREWS 7:23–28

The others who became priests are numerous because death prevented them from continuing to serve. In contrast, [Christ] holds the office of priest permanently because he continues to serve forever. This is why he can completely save those who are approaching God through him, because he always lives to speak with God for them.

It’s appropriate for us to have this kind of high priest: holy, innocent, incorrupt, separate from sinners, and raised high above the heavens. He doesn’t need to offer sacrifices every day like the other high priests, first for their own sins and then for the sins of the people. He did this once for all when he offered himself. The Law appoints people who are prone to weakness as high priests, but the content of the solemn pledge, which came after the Law, appointed a Son who has been made perfect forever.

MARK 10:46–52

Jesus and his followers came into Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho, together with his disciples and a sizable crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, Timaeus’ son, was sitting beside the road. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was there, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy!” Many scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, “Son of David, show me mercy!”

Jesus stopped and said, “Call him forward.”

They called the blind man, “Be encouraged! Get up! He’s calling you.”

Throwing his coat to the side, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man said, “Teacher, I want to see.”

Jesus said, “Go, your faith has healed you.” At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus on the way.

SERMON HYMN: *O Christ, the Healer, We Have Come*