

CHURCH@HOME: Sunday, 24th October, 2021 – The Last Sunday after Trinity

Mark has been the Gospel of this year. By now you may have realized that the Church uses a three-year cycle of spending time reading and studying the three synoptic gospels, and very simply we have years A, B and C! A is Matthew, B is Mark and C is Luke. We have been making our way through Mark since Advent Sunday last November, and on this Advent Sunday, just four weeks away, the 28th November, we begin our journey through Luke. At various times during each year the readings are from John's Gospel.

There is an air of breathless excitement in nearly every sentence Mark writes, and it is the shortest, the most immediate, the most basic of the gospels. Mark is in a hurry to communicate the good news of Jesus. If you have never done it before, I suggest you find the time to sit down and read Mark straight through –perhaps in one of the most recent translations, one that uses our everyday language.

In this week's reading Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He's got as far as Jericho – do you remember the walls of Jericho tumbling down? You can find that story in the first chapters of the Book of Joshua. Jericho was only about 15 miles from Jerusalem, and the main road ran right through the town. Jesus is on his way to the Feast of Passover.

It was the law that every male Jew over 12 years of age who lived within 15 miles of Jerusalem must attend the Passover. Those who were unable to go were in the habit of lining the streets of towns and villages through which groups of Passover pilgrims must pass. I've no doubt news that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem had reached Jericho ahead of him, so there would be even more than usual men, women and children eager and curious to see this Galilean about whom there was so much talk.

Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. He would have been very aware that this day was busier and more crowded than usual. In all probability he would have been sitting cross-legged, leaning against the wall at a place where many people regularly passed by, holding out his begging bowl. As the crowd surrounding Jesus and his disciples walked past him – no doubt there was quite a hubbub, and may be some of the crowd trod on him, even tripped over him – and he definitely knew something special was happening and no doubt he heard Jesus’ name mentioned. Just imagine – this blind man sitting by the side of the road, crowds milling around him, all wanting to catch a glimpse of Jesus and his companions.

Bartimaeus would have been invisible to the crowd – after all he sat there day after day. His only way of being noticed would have been to cry out! This infuriates those around him who try to shut him up. But Bartimaeus shouts even louder and Jesus actually hears him and stops, calling him to him. Those around him now encourage him to get up.

Earlier in this chapter 10 (verse 21) we read that when the rich young man came up to Jesus and asked his question: ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’, Jesus looked at him and ‘loved him’. I like to think that he looked at Bartimaeus in exactly the same way – with love.

For Bartimaeus this was a chance, a moment of decision. He would have heard the gossip of this man Jesus, his miracles, his teaching even as passers-by chatted, probably ignoring him sitting on the ground as they walked past. And he took his chance – he responded to Jesus’ “Come”, throwing off his cloak which would have hindered him, and having got there was faced with Jesus’ question. “What do you want me to do for you?”

And he knew precisely what he wanted Jesus to do – he wanted to see, to have his sight restored. This time there was no touching, no mud, no spit. Jesus’ response was “Go; your faith has made you well.” And Mark tells us, “Immediately he received his sight”.

But that wasn't the end of it. No, Bartimaeus also followed Jesus. In crying out to Jesus and responding to Jesus' question, not only does Bartimaeus receive his physical sight, but he also receives spiritual sight and follows Jesus.

Today Jesus is also asking us that question: "What do you want me to do for you?"

After last Sunday's service when we were remembering St Luke, there was the opportunity for the Sacrament of laying on of hands and anointing, and those who took advantage of this were asked by Tim a similar question. Some asked for prayer for themselves, and some asked for prayer for others, and all were anointed with holy oil for themselves.

What do you want Jesus to do for you?

There's a chorus I used to sing years ago:

Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus
To reach out and touch Him and say that we love Him.
Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.

This would be a good response to Jesus' question today, if you're feeling tongue-tied and can't think of what to say.