

30th Sunday
10/25/2015

WHAT IS SAID AND NOT SAID

Let's do a little communication analysis. First, it's important to pay attention to what is said. Bartimaeus hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by but he doesn't cry out, *Jesus of Nazareth*, but rather, *Jesus, Son of David*. That is to say, Jesus the messiah. Bartimaeus is blind but he sees more clearly who Jesus is than many of those around him. What he cries out for is mercy. Faith allows us to see. Mercy allows us to see differently. Bartimaeus has faith and he asks for mercy.

Last week Jesus was asked a question by James and John, to sit one at his right the other at his left when he came into his kingdom. They were trying to elbow themselves ahead of the other ten apostles. Jesus asked them, *Can you drink the cup I will drink?* This week, Jesus asks a question. *What do you want me to do for you?* Jesus asks the question and Bartimaeus has a ready answer. A useful spiritual exercise is to take the questions that Jesus asks others in the gospels and turn them on ourselves. Questions like: *What were you talking about along the way? Who do you say that I am?* And, *What do you want me to do for you?*

It's also valuable to pay attention to the details. It says Bartimaeus cast aside his cloak. It's as if he didn't want to be slowed down by anything. What's the cloak that's slowing you down; that you need to cast aside, to follow Jesus better?

Second, while it's important to pay attention to what is said, it's also important to pay attention to what is *not* said. After a meeting, after a job interview, especially when checking a reference, it's worthwhile to pay attention to what people said and also to what they did *not* say. Often in St. Mark's gospel, when Jesus heals someone, he tells that person not to tell anyone. But now Jesus is *not* telling Bartimaeus not to tell anyone. Perhaps this change of language indicates a shift in what is happening.

It's also helpful to pay attention to **where** something is said. Jesus is leaving Jericho, a city that can represent sinfulness. He's leaving there and will be going up to Jerusalem, which is high and the only way there is by going *up* to Jerusalem. Jesus has been warning the apostles what will happen there. Jerusalem represents the culmination of Jesus' ministry, his death and resurrection and so Jerusalem can also represent both suffering and heaven.

Finally, it's important to pay attention to what happens **after** all this. Jesus sends Bartimaeus on his way. He's free to go. But instead Bartimaeus follows Jesus along the way. He follows with intentional faith. That way leads to Jerusalem, to the cross and ultimately to the resurrection. "The Way" was an early name for Christianity. Bartimaeus follows Jesus not only along the way, meaning the road from Jericho to Jerusalem but also along, *the* way meaning the way of discipleship; the way of the Cross; the way of the Paschal Mystery, that is renewed at every celebration of the Eucharist. Along this way we die to ourselves and rise to new life.

Bartimaeus teaches us many things. The first is a certain boldness and prayer. He's not ashamed to cry out to Jesus. You could say, he's not afraid to pray. Jesus asks what he desires and Bartimeus responds immediately. St. Augustine said that the Christian life is an exercise in holy desire. We pray to expand our desire and to receive what God wishes to give us. Prayer is stoking the fires of holy desire within us, desire for God already present within us.

Bartimaeus teaches us perseverance. He continues to cry out even when others tell him to be quiet. Their discouragement only serves to encourage him to persevere. In life we can all face a demon of discouragement. One way of combating it is to continue to cry out to Jesus, to persevere in prayer and to continue to exercise that holy desire. Disciples of Jesus can discourage one another or they can support one another. One of the first things we can do to support one another is to get to know each other, to listen to each other and to try to understand each other. Even if we disagree with others, to understand how they think, is a gift. That's something so needed in our world today.

Bartimaeus also teaches us faith. A faith that believes and trusts and then follows Jesus along the way. Like Bartimaeus, with prayer, perseverance and intentional faith, may we follow Jesus along the way, the way that allows us to see, the way that ultimately will allow us to see God.