

St. Ninian's Parish Church
Sunday 28th October 2018

Jeremiah 36: 7 – 9; Hebrews 7: 23 – 28; Mark 10: 46 - 52

I was once part of a small Bible Study group in which there was a man who was blind. For some reason we were talking about what we wanted most in the world, and someone in the group said to the blind man, 'I suppose you would most want to be able to see.' To which the blind man replied, 'No I wouldn't. Most of all in the world I would like to be able to play the violin.'

*Bartimaeus son of Timeaus, a blind beggar, was seated at the roadside. Hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me!' Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?'*¹

A few years ago, the housing charity called Broadway tested a novel approach to tackling homelessness in the City of London.² The charity simply gave each homeless person hundreds of pounds to spend however they wanted. Instead of the usual offer of a place at a hostel, Broadway asked each person without a home what they needed to change their lives.

One asked for a new pair of trainers and a television; another for a caravan on a travellers' site in Suffolk. The approach was simply a trial at the time, and it targeted the longest-term rough sleepers of the 338 rough sleepers identified within the City of London. Of the 13 people who took part in the scheme, 11 moved off the streets.

Compared to some estimates that suggest the state spends £26,000 annually on each homeless person in health, police and prison bills, the average outlay per person of the Broadway scheme was £794. None of those who participated wanted the money to spend on drink, drugs or bets. Several said they cooperated because they were offered control over their lives rather than being "bullied" into hostels. The Chief Executive of Broadway at the time, Howard Sinclair, explained, "We just said, 'It's your life and up to you what you want to do with it, but we are here to help if you want.'"

*Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him'; so, they called the blind man and said, 'Take heart; stand up; he is calling you.'*³

'Stand up,' the crowd said to Bartimaeus. Those words or variations on them are commonly used when it comes to Jesus' healing miracles.

In chapter one of Mark's gospel Simon's mother-in-law was ill in bed. Jesus took her by the hand and helped her to her feet.⁴ In chapter two, Jesus said to a

¹ Mark 10: 47 & 50

² <https://www.economist.com/britain/2010/11/04/cutting-out-the-middle-men>

³ Mark 10:49

⁴ Mark 1:31

paralysed man, 'Stand up, take your bed and walk.'⁵ Later on in that chapter Jesus called the tax collector Levi to follow him. Levi got up and followed him.⁶

In chapter five Jesus healed Jairus' daughter, taking her by the hand and saying to her *Talitha cum*, which means, 'Get up.'⁷ 'He is dead,' the crowd said of an epileptic boy. Jesus took him by the hand and raised him to his feet, and he stood up.⁸

There is a lesson in these stories from my Bible Study Group, from the City of London, and from the Bible about the way God's world works for us. If you want to transform people's lives, you have to respect the dignity and the personhood of the people whose lives you are trying to transform. Ask them what they need, don't just assume that you know. And then try and give them what they are asking for, not what you think is best for them. That gives people a sense of agency and control over their lives, and that sense of agency and control helps people to take responsibility for their lives, to get up.

There is a contrasting example at the beginning of the chapter we read from Mark's gospel. A rich man approached Jesus asking what he had to do to win eternal life? As so many wealthy people discover, riches aren't the answer to life's deepest problems. The man asked, so Jesus told him, and at his words, 'the rich man's face fell, and he went away with a heavy heart; for he was a man of great wealth.'⁹

Whoever you are, if you want to see your life transformed then you have to take some responsibility for transforming it even if doing so is going to be costly. It might be very costly, after all personal transformation and personal gain are not the same thing: you may have to do something costly for someone else to see the meaning, purpose and value of your own life.

Previously in chapter 10 Mark told his readers about the disciples James and John who asked Jesus for a favour, 'What is it you want me to do?' replied Jesus. 'Grant us the right to sit in state with you, one at your right and the other at your left.' Well, God is not going to pay out on that selfish request; 'That is not the way with you,' said Jesus, 'among you, whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life for a ransom for many.'

Giving up their lives, is not what James and John had in mind, nor the rich man. But, Bartimaeus was different, he was prepared to give up all that he had to follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem – where there would be betrayal and execution.

⁵ Mark 2: 9

⁶ Mark 2: 14

⁷ Mark 5: 41

⁸ Mark 9: 27

⁹ Mark 10:17 - 22

But, then Bartimaeus already knew who Jesus was and what Jesus was doing. It is extremely rare for a person whom Jesus heals to be named, and in this story we are told Bartimaeus' full name: Bartimaeus son of Timaeus. That draws our attention to Jesus' full name, which Bartimaeus uses, Jesus, Son of David.

That's the first time that the title Son of David has been used in the Gospel of Mark. Prior to this it had always been Son of Man. It isn't be the last time Son of David is used. It is used again immediately in the next chapter when Jesus rides in to Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowd cry out Hosanna Blessings on the coming kingdom of our father David!¹⁰

using the title Son of David, Bartimaeus showed that he already believed who Jesus was; Bartimaeus already knew what the crowd didn't. When Jesus said that it was his faith that had saved him, that faith was a faith Bartimaeus already had. But, it was a faith repressed by the crowd. Initially, sitting by the road side the crowd had told him to shut up when he cried out to Jesus. Not unlike today when people express their faith in Jesus Christ, or any religious belief. Hold your tongue, would just about sum up the response of our society to religious expression.

Bartimaeus wouldn't hold his tongue though; he raised his voice. If you want to see transformation in the world, in your life, in the lives of others, then you need to be persistent; you need to keep knocking at the door; you need to be brave enough to raise your voice above threats to keep silent. Then, look how fickle the crowd are. They have just told Bartimaeus to pipe down, but as soon as Jesus shows some interest in him, suddenly they are on his side and they are shouting at him, 'Take heart; stand up; he is calling you.'

If you want to see transformation in the world, in your life and in the lives of others and see the Kingdom of God reign on earth in all its justice, mercy, peace, and love, make sure that you don't want to see the Kingdom of God reign on earth for your benefit; you'll only see it when you help others up. And, don't give up trying to work for transformation if your voice isn't heard the first time: raise your voice; demand it all the more; keep knocking.

If you want to see the Kingdom of God reign on earth, in all its justice, its mercy, its peace, its love then pay attention to the personhood of others. Ask them what it is they want, and then try and give it to them. Let them take part in building of the Kingdom in their lives.

If you want to see the Kingdom of God reign on earth, in all its justice, its mercy, its peace, its love, you won't manage that by sitting at home in front of the TV. You need to believe that you can affect transformation and be part of that Kingdom. Get up! He's calling you. Follow him.

¹⁰ Mark 11: 10