

**28 October 2018**

**Mark 10.46-52**

Things are not what they seem. It is the person with a disability who really sees. It is the one who seems vulnerable that is strong and faithful. Jesus acknowledged him and brought out what was already there, his sight. This happened after he called out, after Jesus noticed him and called him in to the centre, from the side of the road, from the edges, to the way.

Things are not what they seem.

Often what holds us back is on the inside not seen by others. Our task is one of seeing with the eyes of the heart, encouraging, calling out people's goodness and strengths.

How encouraging it has been to hear stories from the Invictus games, stories of courage, stories of support, stories of overcoming. People did not grow back lost limbs, they did not necessarily regain their physical sight, but with support and encouragement and the strength within, they have grown to be our teachers.

This week too our Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition have apologised to those who have been abused by institutions, by the people within institutions. People have finally been listened to, heard and seen. On behalf of St Paul's Cathedral I apologise to you and anyone you know who has been abused by anyone, anyone in power in the Anglican Church in this place. I see you and hear you. 'What do you want me to do for you?'

There is a theology in the Old and New Testament, which says our injuries and diseases are our own fault, either due to our sinfulness, lack of faith, or God's judgement. Job's story and the Bartimaeus story reinforce the truth that calamities, misfortune and illness are not necessarily our fault or an expression of God's judgement, and there are many other stories of Jesus ministry that affirm this.

Job lost everything, and his wife advised him to curse God, but he didn't. He kept the lines of communication open. He and God had very robust words with each other. And Job, like the man who was blind handed him self over to God, let go, and found healing.

Loader adapted:

'There is a span of material in Mark's gospel, reaching from 8:27 to 10:45, which is bound together by a loose thread and a common movement. The movement is from north to south, more particularly, from the northern borders of Galilee to the beginning of the steep ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem. It is the way to the cross. Three times threaded through the passage Jesus announces that as Son of Man he will suffer and be rejected (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). Three times the disciples fail to understand. They show themselves blind to his purpose and to his values. Mark has set on either side of this span of material two accounts of Jesus' healing of blind men (8:22-26 and 10:46-52). The intention is doubtless symbolic. The disciples are blind. That is a primary function of today's passage in Mark's gospel...

The overall effect of what Mark is doing here is to reinforce the message of that great span of material, to challenge contemporary disciples to see what Jesus (and God) is really about. In Mark's gospel it is time to reflect. But there is more: the blind man of Jericho hails Jesus as 'Son of David'.

In the scene which follows, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, we find him again hailed as Davidic king (11:10). Only days later he will hang on a cross as "king of the Jews". So our episode is also looking forward to the completion of the journey.

But what about Bartimaeus? He is twice named (10:46): 'son of Timaeus' and 'Bartimaeus' - meaning something like: son of the precious or worthy one. Probably more symbolism!

But what about the real person under all this symbolic development?

What if I am visually impaired, partially or fully blind?

I cannot be reduced to a symbolic prop. What must it be like with all these words about blindness and songs about recovering sight when you know you are blind and will never see?

There are many ways of being ignored, treated as someone who does not matter, or made into a stereotype.

Is it possible to truly belong as a person with a disability in a community? Again I point to the stories from the Invictus Games. People with disabilities, heard and honoured, and living life to the full.

Bartimaeus is typically sidelined - on the side of the road.. When he raised his voice (10:47), people were quick to remind him he was a nobody (10:48).

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. When victims cry out for justice, they are often told to just take it and move on. When people commit crimes and seek mercy to rebuild their lives, society wants to lock them up and throw away the key.

With the persistence which can characterise the desperate, Bartimaeus does not shy away from being a nuisance. Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' Jesus' ears are especially tuned to hear the *kyrie eleison*, 'Lord have mercy' whenever and wherever it may be voiced.

Jesus responds. He asks him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'What do you really want?' He listens. He responds to him as someone of value. He hears his request, Bartimaeus is healed. 'Your faith has saved you' must mean in Mark: you believed I could do this; so I can do it and will. <sup>1</sup>

Mark Mc Gowan:

'Is the fact that Bartimaeus throws off his mantle before coming to Jesus symbolic of things we have to discard before we are open to receiving grace?

Symbolic of what kinds of things?

What about the thing(s) I personally - not just 'we' generally - have to throw aside?

'Most of the others Jesus has healed, he tells to stay where they are, not follow him, not even tell about him, but for whatever reason (perhaps they're so close to Jerusalem & Passion Time?) Bartimaeus is an exception. Given the social & church cultures we spring from, haven't we for a long time worked on the assumption

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<sup>1</sup> Loader

that like those disciples who want to be special, Jesus doesn't want us / need us to move on from where we are?

Is it timely that more of us see the need to move on in our God-journey in the light of whatever gifts having our eyes opened brings us?<sup>2</sup>

Loader again:

'Bartimaeus went with Jesus on the journey from the sidelines to the centre - back to more symbolism.

A nobody in the world's eyes, a sidelined person, a blind beggar, becomes the hero of faith. This is typically Mark at his subversive best. Mark can do this because he knew such stories. Jesus did not sideline people. Jesus responded to what were seen as the 'hopeless cases' of his day.

Whether at the symbolic level or at a literal level, the story illustrates an approach to people which is central to Jesus' teaching.

How do we retell the story without sidelining blind people today?

That is easier said than done. If we play up the miraculous we heighten the pain where healing is not happening and may be impossible. Piety can easily race by in the euphoria of symbolism and then the only abiding message is: we are irrelevant - and you are irrelevant.

Despite the inevitable exaggerations it is likely that Jesus did perform healings. It is too difficult otherwise to explain the strength of the tradition. Its relevance is another question - very relevant for the fortunate ones healed, very significant as a symbol of recovery and renewal, notable as fulfilment of biblical images of hope.

But where the focus falls on the achievements, the cry from the roadside must be heard: me, too!

Why do you prattle on about all these wonders when you know well that I shall be like this for the rest of my life?

How can you be so insensitive, unrealistic?

'Honest caring which does not over-promise or load me with guilt at promises unfulfilled is what I want from the side of the road. I, too,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/marginallymark/MMK104652P20.html> Mark Mc Gowan

am someone of worth. Of course, I want change where that can be done, but I don't want to be the stuff of your miracles and potential propaganda. I am not odd, stupid, a "case", a need - I'm a person, not a discounted person or a person to be discounted.

We need to listen to Bartimaeus. Thank God he spoke up. When we do listen, we will know the journey we are on'.<sup>3</sup>

Things are not what they seem, but there is juiciness and real life in Jesus.

*Susanna*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/MkPentecost22.html>