

PENTECOST XXI

‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Mark 10:52

The story of blind Bartimaeus is a healing story that is also a story of discipleship. What Jesus says to Bartimaeus could be rendered *Your faith has cured you*, or *Your faith has made you whole*, or even *Your faith has saved you*. That Bartimaeus regains his sight, the physical cure, is only part of a more complete restoration or redemption. Because, once healed, Bartimaeus follows Jesus *on the way*.

Bartimaeus is persistent. He sits by the side of the road, yelling to get Jesus’ attention, annoying the crowd around him. We can imagine – we’ve all seen and heard folks like this on the T, or the sidewalk, crying out loudly and apparently randomly, disturbing our peace. We make heroic efforts to ignore them, to shut them out. We’d love to be able to tell them to be quiet, as the people around Bartimaeus do.

But not Jesus. Jesus calls Bartimaeus to him. And the call transforms the crowd from irritable obstructionists to enablers. *Take heart*, they say, *he is calling you*. Bartimaeus throws down his cloak and rushes forward, desperate and insistent after years of rejections and humiliation. And Jesus asks, *what can I do for you?*

So, call and response. Bartimaeus’s call, and Jesus response, to heal, which is also a call, a summons. And then Bartimaeus’s response, which is to become a disciple.

But there’s another level to the story: the level at which Bartimaeus’s position in society parallels that of so many others whom Jesus heals. Like the woman who touches the hem of Jesus’ garment, like the Gerasene demoniac, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the blind man at Bethsaida, and the little children, Bartimaeus is an outsider, someone at the very edge of society, marginalized, cast aside. These folks are at the heart of Jesus’ ministry, then and now.

These are the ones who have nothing left to lose – certainly not their pride, and their need makes them bold and reckless, pushy, and, you might say, rude. Certainly, they act out of line with the rigid norms of their society. But Jesus does not rebuke them. He welcomes them, he participates in their healing, and he sends them on their way – or takes them with him on his way.

I say that Jesus participates in their healing because it seems as if their persistence, the depths of their neediness and their clarity about what they need, and their profound belief that Jesus is the man for them— these qualities seem as much a part of the

healing process as whatever it is that Jesus does. These folks are entirely open, vulnerable, ready to respond to Jesus' healing touch. They are *ready* to be healed, and healed they are.

As many of you know, I was away last week in Jacksonville, Florida, to officiate at a wedding. There is much to be said about that trip under the heading of *What We Do for Jesus*, but as with most such endeavors, I believe I received much more from the experience than I gave. And part of what I received was the company of the best man.

I am intrepid about some things, but driving around at night in strange cities after dark is not among them. So I was assigned a chauffeur, the best man, Mack, to get me to the wedding rehearsal and dinner, and the wedding and reception. I said that I didn't want to interfere with his ability to stay out late and party, but he replied that he is sober and would welcome an excuse *not* to stay out late and party. So we were mutually beneficial.

Mack had grown up in Jacksonville and gone to highschool with the groom, but had moved North after that and had not been back since – 15 years or more, I imagine – so this trip was time travel for him. Moreover, he and his wife were in the process of divorcing so when he returned to Cambridge after the weekend, he would be returning to an empty house. So this trip was heroic for him. An extremely complex adventure, and a real tribute to his love for and loyalty to the groom.

He planned to give a toast at the reception – the best man's responsibility, and he'd clearly been thinking about it and planning it in his mind. The reception was in an outside courtyard at the public library – a lovely space – but the weather in Jacksonville had turned chilly and no one was dressed warmly enough for the occasion. And the microphone had never made it to the venue, so it was uncertain whether Mack would be able to deliver his toast. But the groom really wanted him to, and so some of us gathered around in a circle to hear his simple but powerful speech about the couple and his hopes for them. He ended by saying that he was struck by the depth and strength of the couple's love for one another, and that he felt *there might be enough love here for all of us*.

As we walked to the parking garage after that, I told him how eloquent and lovely I had found his toast. He said, "well, this has kind of come full circle for me. The last time I spoke in public in Jacksonville was at my highschool graduation. I had a psychotic break on the stage – I was kind of messed up with LSD and I was not meant to be speaking at all. I was hauled off the stage and ended up in a locked ward for two weeks at the local mental hospital."

I was about to reply when we got to the garage, and discovered gates across the exit, and for a few panicked minutes thought we would not be able to retrieve Mack's car. So I didn't have a chance to say what I think, and what I intend to tell him, which is, *this is what we call redemption!*

Talk about *call and response*: the groom *calling*, asking him to be best man, Mack *responding*, giving the groom the gift of his presence and his tribute, and in the process, *calling* us all to partake of the love present in the occasion. And talk about participating in your own healing, as I have said about the folks whom Jesus heals! Talk about coming home – coming home to yourself, the self God means you to be!

Because that's what these stories of healing and discipleship sound like to me – stories of coming home to the self, stories of coming home to Jesus, which turn out to be the same thing, in the end. Coming home, as I pray Mack has done, or will do, to a place *where there is love enough for all of us*.

Stories of coming home to the self, stories of coming home to Jesus, which turn out to be the same thing, in the end. That's not true for the whole world, of course, and probably not for Mack. But for those folks in the Gospels who find Jesus and whom he heals, it seems to be true. In finding Jesus, they find themselves, their true selves, the selves God is calling them to be. And for those of us here, today, who follow Jesus, I hope and pray we are finding in him and in his *way* our true home, and discovering the selves God is calling us to be. And if we are, if we do, then we are participating in our own healing, and we are learning the meaning of discipleship. And we are learning, I hope and pray, my dear friends, to believe that here *there is love enough for all of us*. Alleluia! Amen.