

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Job 42:1-6,10-17; Psalm 34; Mark 10:46-52

The Gospel reading for today is all about having the faith to ask and the faith to follow.

At one time Bartimeaus, the blind beggar who sat by the roadside, could see. His life was full of light and, we can assume, full of hope. And then something happened to him. He ended up being unable to see and his options in life collapsed, and he ended up a beggar, sitting by the roadside, hoping that someone would pity him, that someone would fill his bowl with food, or give him a few coins to purchase the things that everyone needs. There was little sympathy in his day for those who were blind.

Because Bartimeaus was blind, he was, in many people's eyes, less than human. He was an object to be pitied, or cursed, or ignored.

How many of us feel the way that Bartimeaus must have felt?

How many of us feel cut off from the land of the living, prevented by one reason or another from fully participating in the life that goes on around us, unable to exercise the options that everyone else seems to have, hurting and alone, and wondering, wondering if perhaps we deserve what we are experiencing? How many of us feel trapped in the life we have, in the job we have, in the relationships we have, in the body we have? How many of us feel unable to break free, unable to change things, unable to do anything but dream of how it used to

be, or of how it should be? And how many of us, being in that position, do anything about it? How many reach out for help?

How many of us reach out to our friends and neighbours and confide in them our feelings, our needs? How many of us actually ask our family members for help when we need it?

How many of us even think to reach out to God and ask that He help? Sometimes we suffer long and hard, not because the situation cannot be overcome, but because we are afraid to ask for help, we do not want to be a burden to others, or perhaps we do not want to seem weak to others, or to our own selves.

There are times when we all need help, times when we must turn to other people, and to God, and ask for what we need. This asking is a hard thing to do, but there are times when we all need help, times when we must turn to other people and to God, or perish. The good news is that there is no situation in life that is so bad that someone cannot help us with it, that someone can not help us to overcome it, or to bear it with a hope and a strength that transforms it, and us, completely.

And where we cannot go to someone else for that help, there is no situation where we cannot go to God for help, and find the help we need. God does not always answer our prayers in the way we want them answered, but God does answer them in a way that is appropriate, in that God always gives us what we need, God always gives us strength to bear what we must bear, and to bear it so well that our world changes because of it.

This is the lesson of the Garden of Gethsemane and of every dark night of the soul. It is the lesson of the cross and of the tomb, and of all suffering that God may ask us to bear. It is what lies behind all transformation, what lies behind Easter, what lies behind new life, eternal life, abundant and rich life.

Come unto me all who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened to you. Ask and you shall receive. These are the promises of Christ, promises that He kept time and time again in His walk upon this earth, promises that He still keeps from heaven as He intercedes for us before the throne of God.

Many commentators on today's Scripture reading from Mark, comment on how blind Bartimeaus could see more as a blind person, than many people can see with their sight. They comment about how Bartimaeus saw Jesus as one who could help him, how he saw Jesus as the Son of David, the Messiah. and how, in that seeing, was not afraid to ask Jesus for what he needed. It is to be blind to Christ and to ignore his presence when we are struggling with some issue, or caught up in some situation that is hurting us and hurting someone else. We know the faith it takes to ask God for help; the courage it takes to go to someone and to confess our need to them; and the vision it requires to admit our blindness and to beg for help when all about us are telling us to be quiet. But what is more interesting about blind Bartimeaus is that he not only saw Jesus as one who could help him, and had the faith to ask for that help, is that after he was helped and told to go his own way, he had the faith to follow Jesus.

We must believe that God can and will help us with our problems, that His word will give us the wisdom and the insight that we need when we feel lost. Believe that Christ will reach out and touch us when we call upon Him, that He will give us rest when we seek it. Truly believe that the Spirit will give us strength when we wait upon Him and guide and lead us when we turn to Him. Be sure, that God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - will do all this freely for us, without demanding that we do anything special, or be anyone special. God will help

us in many and various ways, sometimes through others, sometimes directly within our hearts, and always without expectation of anything in return.

After He helps those who have had the faith to turn to Him for help, Jesus almost always says, as He said to Bartimeaus, “go, your faith has made you well”. But what a wonderful thing it is, if when we have faith to ask, we also have the faith to follow and to learn to do for others what has been done for us. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Don’t be afraid to turn to our friends and our neighbours and share our needs; and don’t be afraid to turn to God, who can help us when no one else can. Don’t be afraid to ask, and after asking, in perfect freedom, pass on what we have received, and follow the one who gives all that He has for us.

Praise be to God for the salvation He grants us through Christ Jesus our Lord, our brother, our friend, and our servant.

AMEN.