

PSALM 126 ~ MARK 10:46-52
 Great is Thy Faithfulness: The Impossible Promise of Faith
 25th Sunday after Pentecost ~ November 10, 2024 (2nd of 3-part Stewardship Series)
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Introduction to Gospel Reading:

"What do you want me to do for you?" This is what you will hear Jesus ask Bartimaeus in today's gospel story. Notice that Jesus *does not assume* that he knows what the blind, beggar Bartimaeus wants or needs. Even though he is Jesus, and Bartimaeus, blind beggar that he is—well, isn't it *obvious* what he wants? Maybe not. "What do you want me to do for you?" Sound familiar? It's been three weeks and one presidential election since my first sermon in this 3-sermon series. Nevertheless, if this question sounds familiar, you are right! It is the same question Jesus asked James and John, just ten verses ago back in Mark 10:36. You may recall what James and John wanted Jesus to do, was quite different than Bartimaeus. They were unabashedly jockeying for seats on either side of Jesus at the Captain's Table on the Jesus Glory cruise, *after* all the bad stuff went down that Jesus kept telling them about.

But today's story—the one about Bartimaeus and Jesus is very *next* story in Mark's gospel. We find ourselves with Jesus, his twelve disciples and a crowd of followers just leaving Jericho, their last stop before Jesus enters Jerusalem and toward the cross that awaits him there that very Friday. Yes, the very horrible, awful, unthinkable thing that Jesus has warned them about—not once but three times--is just about to go down. But not quite yet. First this gem of a call story rich with teaching, healing, humor, and irony: more than enough gospel for all of us, today.

So let's see what we see: as *Blind* Bartimaeus who perceives exactly whom Jesus is, way better than Jesus' 12 sighted disciples. *Beggar* Bartimaeus, a poor, nobody on the side of the road until Jesus halts the whole crowd and responds to him. *Bold* Bartimaeus, who keeps crying out louder and louder. *Faithful* Bartimaeus who throws off his cloak, springs up: expecting transformation while still under the cloak of unsighted darkness. And see Teacher, Rabbi, Lord Jesus' and learn from his gracious, generous, and unconditional "yes." Freely given with no expectations.

Whether you have been shouting or whispering to God; whether you are feeling jubilant or dismayed, let us all listen for Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?" in this reading of God's holy word. [Read text Mark 10:46-52]

Sermon:

Today is a day for truth telling. So, let's start with this: The reality that a week ago today, most of us were holding our breaths, obsessively checking our newsfeeds and favorite social media sights, doing our part in the run up to election day, last Tuesday, November 5. And the closer we got to election day, the more anxious we became and the less sleep we got. Were we not starting to pray as if one person (our candidate of choice) could save us? Or as if one

political party could save us? And if the other one prevailed, well, we didn't even want to think about that.

I have Good News for all of us today. A truth that perhaps we have forgotten or set aside: No single person or party can or will save us. Christ has already done that. Christ has been to Calvary and back. That is why we are here today. Somehow in the last ten years or so, perhaps too gradually for us to notice: here in the US, politics has become our new religion. As church attendance has steadily declined, fewer and fewer people turn to their faith to form their identity to help them see who and whose they are. And whom God is calling them to be. We in the church are not immune to this phenomenon. It seems we too have allowed our political convictions have taken on a religious dimension. And in doing that, we slide into thinking that the person we elect (or hoped to elect) will be the one to save us. Beloved Community of Easter people: Here today in this sanctuary, as we are gathered at the foot of the cross and stare into the empty tomb, at the end of the presidential election season, let's be as honest as we can. Are we asking our politics to do what God has already done? And what only God can do going forward.

Whether the quick and decisive results of our national election day seemed to you like a dream or a nightmare: either way, I believe we share the sense that the decisive results seem unreal, so impossible, so beyond explanation even beyond anticipation. Whether you feel elated or blindsided by the results of this week's election, the question that unites us is this: What does it mean to be a person of faith in this political climate? How can we be Jesus' hands and feet and voice here in this post-election new reality? What is God calling us to be and do today? To begin with, I hear Jesus saying to us as individuals and as a church, the words that the disciples said to Bartimaeus. *Take heart; Get up, he is calling you!* Note that the Greek word translated here as "get up" is the very same word that is used for Jesus' resurrection, being raised from the dead, again getting up! With this in mind, let's give each other the gift of this wonderful message right now. Simply turn to a person sitting near you and say: *Take heart; Get up, he is calling you!*

Today, we can learn from Bartimaeus *and* from Jesus in this story. We can be amused by the disciples' humorously immediate turnaround from shushing Bartimaeus, "sternly ordering him to be silent!" (just like they had tried to do with the with the people who were bringing little children to him) to calling him out: Come on, get up, he is calling you! The big moment for Bartimaeus, and what does he do? He throws off his cloak, then springs up, and comes over to where Jesus has stopped to wait for him.

Did you catch that? Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, before he is healed. While still without sight. Bartimaeus is expecting transformation before it happens. How about us, do we? Bartimaeus has faith in the power of Christ to give him what he needs. In fact, with his loud and louder bold shouting, addressing Jesus, as "Son of David," Mark is signaling something significant that would be easy for us to miss. So far in Mark, no one else has been able to perceive who Jesus is this well with so little data. In fact: this is the only passage in Mark in which the title "son of David" appears. The blind beggar on the side of the road can see what even

Jesus' own twelve disciples, his inner circle, are struggling to see and understand about their Lord, even as they are just steps away from entering Jerusalem for the last time.

Here is what we can learn from what Jesus did. Listen carefully, they are moves we would do well to employ in our relationships. When Bartimaeus started calling out. Jesus listened, rather than silencing him; Jesus stopped, we are told Jesus stood still. Then Jesus did not presume to know what Bartimaeus wanted, he asked "What do you want me to do for you?" And Jesus responded accordingly. Neither did Jesus exact any kind of quid pro quo. Although not explicitly called to follow Jesus, that's what he chose to do as soon as he received his sight. We are told: Bartimaeus "followed him on the way." Yes, restored, renewed, transformed Bartimaeus, became one of Jesus disciples, following him into Jerusalem that day.

Next Sunday, we are asking you to faithfully determine your financial pledge for 2025. To consider what you will give to further the unifying work of God's kingdom right here in Marshfield and beyond. To support our call to be Christ's hands and feet, spreading Christ's compassion and mercy, truly loving our neighbor as Christ has taught us. Leaning on the everlasting arms and leaning into the work of the One who laid down his life that we might bring the universe back into alignment. To be a place and a people where loving God and neighbor brings peace and justice to every neighbor and neighborhood.

If you think about it, pledging next Sunday for 2025: Isn't that something like Bartimaeus throwing off his cloak, *before* Jesus has spoken to him directly or healed him? Like Bartimaeus, may we too have the faith to anticipate the transformational work of Christ in and among us in the year ahead, as we prayerfully consider what we can pledge and dedicate next Sunday, Nov. 17.

Let us remember and live into this truth: Our identity is in Christ, we belong to the heavenly kingdom, and this is not based upon policies, polls, or partisans. From the 30,000 feet level, let us consider God's political vision at the beginning of the Universe. In the beginning of Genesis we are told, God's political vision was to order the universe for us to live in right relationship with all people and all creation. Jesus' taught us and showed us, the way to realize this vision was *not* by trying to seize control or power, but rather to protect what we value, laying down our lives for others. To stop, to listen, to resist the temptation to presume or assume we understand the other. And then to generously, graciously, lean into the faith that gives us the courage to say "yes." The courage to become a non-anxious, non-defensive presence in our own skins, within our families and friends, out in the community, and the world.

God will not, does not fail to will and to work for the good of all creation. And God calls us to partner in that will and that work. I will close with this blessing from God to you here in our sanctuary, and you who are worshipping onscreen, wherever your heart may be:

Blessed are you, who pick up the pieces: who gather sticks and saw down limbs, who drag away the broken branches and rake up what you can amid chaos only to turn and see that somehow destruction still remains.

Blessed are you, the carriers: those who carry water bottles in parking lots, who carry boxes of donations into the gym, those who carry small children around the house with no power, those who carry their own needs, and the needs of others.

Blessed are you, who repair what has been broken: the fallen power lines, the toppled fences, the dwindling morale, the wounded spirits.

Blessed are you, those who hope: the change-makers, the bridge-builders, the road clearers, the hand-holders.

Blessed are you, those who feel exhausted, overwhelmed, afraid, grateful.

Blessed are we, this beloved community.

May we find peace in the aftermath, rest, even amid ongoing needs.

May we tap out, allowing others to tap in, so that we might sustain this place as one that nurtures those who pick up the pieces, those who carry, those who repair, those who feel, and those who hope.ⁱ

For Christ's sake, Beloved community:

Take heart; Get up, he is calling you. And you. And you. And us. Amen.

ⁱ by Rev. Eliza Smith DeBevoise, Presbyterian Outlook website, from Beth Murphy's, Oct. 31, 2024 FPC Arpin Letter.