

The Sunday Missive – October 31, 2021 The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 686 Come, thou font of every blessing

Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace!
Streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! O fix me on it, mount of God's unchanging love.

Here I find my greatest treasure; hither by thy help, I've come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee;
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKOoeTbjSel>

Collect of the Day

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children, may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and

so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Psalm 146

I will praise the Lord as long as I live* I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes* In mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth* On that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob* Whose hope is in the Lord their God,

Who made heaven and earth; the sea, and all that is in them* Who keeps faith forever;

Who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry* The Lord sets the prisoners free;

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down* The Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow* But the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations* Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Hebrews 9:11-15

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

Hymn 656 Blest are the pure in heart

Blest are the pure in heart, for they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs, their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord, who left the heavens our life and peace to bring,
To dwell in lowliness with us, our pattern and our King;

He to the lowly soul will still himself impart
And for his dwelling and his throne will choose the pure in heart.

Lord, we thy presence seek; may ours this blessing be;
Give us a pure and lowly heart, a temple fit for thee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpnU2auc3Rk>

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which

commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,' —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Toss it Away, Straightway! – Proper 25B

Perhaps a week late, let's go back and look at the story we heard from Mark's gospel, chapter 10 about Bartimaeus, the blind man, who raised his voice to the healing Jesus. "As they were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. He heard it was Jesus and began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" They sternly demanded that he be quiet, but instead he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called saying, "Take heart; he is calling you." So he sprang up and came to Jesus, who said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

This Gospel of Mark we have been considering this year has its own character. The stories crackle with raw emotion and stern admonition. They don't seem to be prettied up or refined – they're dusty and creaky like old saddle leather – they're quirky and corny and deliberate, like my ancient Mixmaster, with its spinning bowl and odd settings like "juicing," "fruit cakes," and "more pulp." And they work just as well, which is to say very well.

Mark sets down the narrative of Jesus' life and ministry the way he thinks future readers (like us) might just be able to hear it, with lots of

symbolism and movement and urgency. Today's story in particular has the feel of a legend, with its memorable names and timeless action: "What do you want me to do for you?" ... "Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way."

Scholars and preachers argue over whether Bar-Timaeus means 'Son of Honor' or 'Son of Impurity;' so we can either talk about him as the honorable example of what we should do in relation to Jesus, or as a wretched example of a fellow who must get help from Jesus before he can amount to anything. Like so many expressions in human language, the right answer is, "both." Either way, we understand that we are supposed to pay close attention, something bigger than just a routine healing is going on here.

Hence that word 'immediately;' it comes up dozens of times in Mark's Gospel. In the first English translation, the King James Bible, they used the (now obsolete) word, 'Straightway!' Straightway this! and straightway that! "Straightway, he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way." It's storytelling with an urgent purpose. Straight tells us that there is a course to follow that can be clearly determined. *Koinos*, "The Way" was the name given to the following of Jesus before the word *Kristianismos*, 'Christianity' ever came into use. 'Straightway,' therefore lends a sense of direction, conviction and speed to the events described. They must happen; they must happen now, and with good reason. This is a vibrant and iconic story. An Aesop's Fable after a triple mochaccino.

Jesus is moving towards his destiny in Jerusalem. We heard about the first steps in that final earthly journey. Today we hear that, as the road goes through Jericho, the crowds of pilgrims headed for Jerusalem are beginning to build. Straightway, a loud voice is heard above the dusty throng: "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" ..."Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!!" The storyteller lets us know it felt like an unnecessary and distracting digression. The disciples and townspeople tell Bartimaeus to shut up.

What is Mark the Evangelist saying to us here? We've already seen plenty of healings and heard plenty of teachings. Why do we have to stop...just stop! -- whatever we're doing -- for this guy? We need to get

to Jerusalem for the real action. Get down, beggar, the Man's got more important things to do than deal with you.

Who is this Bar-Timaeus, anyway? This honorable son of misery? Jesus has been getting famous, dealing with rich men and veteran disciples, talking about the Kingdom. What is it about the blind man that catches his attention? Perhaps it is the raw cry of desire – “You have what I want!” – that moves the Son of Man.

For the first time, Jesus answers to a King's name -- Son of David -- and lets himself be publicly identified with the ancient throne of the Jews. When he is killed in Jerusalem, they will indeed kill a king, so Jesus must come to accept the full implications of his destiny, and the names that go with it.

“Have mercy!” bellows the man, not just any blind man, mind you, but Bar-Timaeus, the most honorable #1 son... of misery. Until now, Jesus has been healing good, faithful, nameless people – anybody. But this symbolic engagement is with a very specific someone; someone full of potential who has been brought low by life. In order to be the Savior of us all, Jesus must first engage with the least of us, this Son of Misery. No amount of chiding or bullying or obfuscating is going to stop that misery's child from calling out, “Have mercy!”

The question we must ask ourselves is this: What are the blindnesses in us that block our potential to live and love wholly and freely? When we are holding onto, or acquiescing to whatever prejudiced reactions, habitual violence and established means of oppression drive and support our behaviors and institutions, how can we ever know to call for help? How can we recognize our own blindness and seek new sight (insight) unless we listen to the voices of the powerless? How can we be aware that Jesus is always passing by and eager to share the healing power of God's grace? Bartimaeus knows perfectly well how blind he is physically, but seeing involves the mind, the emotions and the will too; you don't need eyes to see God. So who was really blind, Bartimaeus, or the people who tried to shut him up?

When Jesus called him, Bartimaeus “sprang up, threw off his cloak and came...” The story says he was blind, not crazy. The cloak was the

prize, sometimes the only possession of beggars. It still is. At night it was their bed, by day it lay on the ground collecting the coins tossed by passing pilgrims. To throw it away was unthinkable, unless you knew that you would be able to see your way back to finding it.

It's not that Bartimaeus believes Jesus can help him, he knows it. No doubt that knowledge is in the sound of his voice, and Jesus hears it. How radically different that is from so many of us who want to interview God for an internship in our lives, put Jesus on probation, while we see whether or not we like what he can do for us. But Bartimaeus yells out loudly and in earnest certainty.

We are all given our personal and our societal opportunities to meet Jesus along the way. These are the moments when what is wrong with us is clear, and so is the solution. The situation in which Bar-Timaeus finds himself demands an immediate, a straightway response. He has a sudden encounter with his own reality: This is who I am, a blind man, and here is what I can do about it: Ask for help. Called by name, in his own language, he springs up and comes to Jesus, leaving everything behind, even before he is healed. In his own way already seeing, he knows, so he follows.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Bartimaeus has every reason to distrust God who, most people thought was punishing the blind. But he sees; he throws away his cloak and follows. We have lots of reasons not to examine ourselves and move into new ways of integrity and justice, but can we toss off our old cloaks for good? We cannot forget that the Word of God is inescapably prophetic, and so a life lived in faithfulness to the Word will inevitably have prophetic, and likely difficult dimensions. Can we spring up and follow anyway, even while we know we're still blind? How many cloaks will we have to toss away?

Returning to Mahatma Gandhi for a moment. He loved to collect prayers for peace from many traditions and cultures. One from the Bahai describes the 'Way' Jesus would help us see:

*Be Generous in prosperity
And thankful in adversity.*

*Be fair in judgement
And guarded in speech
Be a lamp for those who walk in darkness
And a home to the stranger.
Be eyes to the blind
And a guiding light to the feet of the erring.
Be a breath of life
To the body of humankind,
A dew on the garden of the human heart,
Be yourself fruit upon the tree of humility.*

The Prayers of the People

Let us give thanks for all God's gifts so freely bestowed upon us: For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea. ***We thank you, Lord.***

For all that is gracious in our lives; all that reveals to us the image of Christ, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For the brave and courageous, who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and justice, ***We thank you, Lord.***

For the communion of saints, in all times and places, for all the faithful, ***We thank you, Lord.***

Above all, we give thanks for the great mercies and promises given to

us in Christ Jesus our Lord; to him be praise and glory, with you, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**

I ask your prayers this day for all who are in any sickness, need or any kind of trouble, especially Karen, Katharine, Kelli, Gail, the family and friends of Tom Samose and all those we hold in our hearts this day. for all those in distress and mourning.

I ask your prayers this day for those who have died, especially Tom Samose, are there others? _____ Pray for the faithful departed. **Amen.**

Hymn 594 God of grace and God of Glory

God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power;
Crown thine ancient Church's story; bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour,
For the facing of this hour.

Lo! the hosts of evil round us scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us free our hearts to faith and praise:
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days,
For the living of these days.

Cure thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to thy control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss thy kingdom's goal,
Lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;
Let the gift of thy salvation be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving thee whom we adore,
Serving thee whom we adore.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpabk2796xl>

Live the days God gives you. Notice the people around you. Receive the surprises God sends you. Love each other as you want to be loved. Let your hearts be broken. Let your hearts be healed. Let your sight be restored. And the blessing of God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier be with you this day and remain with you always. *Amen.*

Sonnet XLIV

Press'd by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
 While the loud equinox its pow'r combines,
 The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
 The wild blasts, rising from the Western cave,
 Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
 And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
 With shells and seaweed mingled, on the shore,
Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
 But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
 They hear the warring elements no more:
While I am doom'd—by life's long storm opprest,
 To gaze with envy, on their gloomy rest.

Charlotte Smith