

Contexts

Mark's Gospel

- Composed between 65-70 CE
- Generally accepted as the first Gospel written.
- Authorship is unclear but possibly written by John Mark, the companion of Peter in Rome.
- Begins with the ministry of John the Baptist in the wilderness, then the Baptism of Jesus, then Jesus battling the forces of evil in the wilderness.
- First action of Jesus is to establish a community to establish the kingdom of God.
- Major work of this community is the work of healing and restoring God's right order, as opposed to the order of Rome, or the order established by the scribes and Pharisees, or religious and cultural norms of the time.
- Cleansing & healing stories restore people to their proper (rightful) place in the Kingdom and in human society (no longer outcasts, despised, unclean, etc).
- The right order of God's kingdom shatters and goes beyond the human and religious limitations placed on some of God's beloved sons and daughters.
- There is a characteristic starkness in Mark's Gospel – it is the shortest of the 4 canonical Gospels.
- Often the story is told by contrast – who is truly blind: the blind beggar or the seeing disciples, who is truly rich: the person who has great wealth or the one who is rich in the sight of God, etc.

Mark 10:46-52 – things to notice

- Follows immediately from last Sunday's Gospel.
- Jesus and the disciples are on the road to Jerusalem.
- The disciples and a large crowd accompany Jesus.
- A blind beggar shouts out – uses the title "Son of David" and asks of Jesus' pity.
- "Son of David" – same phrase as will be used to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem - which follows immediately after the story of Bartimaeus.
- People tell him to shut up, but he shouts all the louder.
- When Jesus calls him, he throws off his cloak (a prized possession in the ancient world – maybe all he has[?]) and jumps up – there is a sense of eagerness and energy in Bartimaeus' action – Jesus calls, Bartimaeus responds immediately.
- "What do you want me to do for you" – note Jesus asks the same question he asked of James and John in last Sunday's Gospel.
- Bartimaeus asks, not for positions of power (like James and John), but to be able to see again.
- Note the contrast between the faith and enthusiasm of Bartimaeus and the hesitancy, reluctance and lack of faith of the disciples – who is REALLY blind, Bartimaeus or the disciples in last Sunday's Gospel?
- "Go, your faith has saved you" – Bartimaeus has faith and his prayer is answered – note that the request of James and John in last Sunday's Gospel was NOT answered.
- Remember that healing stories in the Gospel are not just about physical cure of an illness or ailment. They are about restoring the person, not just physically, but also socially and religiously. Now Bartimaeus is released from begging, now he can earn a wage, now he is released from the suspicion that evil has possessed him, released from the idea that his own sin has caused him to lose his sight. He is restored, made at rights with himself, his society and his religion.

- Jesus tells him to "Go..." but Bartimaeus does not go on his own way. Instead he follows Jesus on HIS way – on the way to Jerusalem, to suffering, death and resurrection..
- The very next verse begins the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

This Gospel is part of the semi-continuous reading of Mark's Gospel. From 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time we are looking at that section of Mark which deals with the Mystery of the Son of Man and, in particular, the 'Way' of the Son of Man.

We are approaching the end of the Liturgical Year. This Gospel concludes Jesus' instruction of the disciples about his Way. Whereas the disciples are slow to understand and to respond and get distracted by their own needs for power, wealth and status, Bartimaeus is presented as the model of the true disciple.

There are some more instructions on true discipleship on 32nd Sunday. We don't hear the Gospel from Mark on 31st Sunday this year (the Great Commandment) because the feast of All Saints fall on next Sunday this year.

Reflection

The first reading is part of a hymn by the prophet Jeremiah which celebrates the return and restoration of God's people after years of exile. A people in need is rescued by God who acts as a loving father.

There are all kinds of blindness - physical, lack of insight or perception, an unwillingness to see a confronting reality, and so on. For many weeks now we have travelled with Jesus and the disciples as they head towards Jerusalem. Many times, the disciples have seemed almost wilfully blind to understanding the mission of Jesus. Time and again, their own egos seem to get in the way – arguments about which is the greatest, wanting to be people of high status, powerbrokers and princes and rulers in the kingdom.

On this journey Jesus has been instructing the disciples about his mission and their call to be true followers of his. As we have seen, they have largely resisted both.

We are nearing the end of the journey. Today's Gospel episode, the cure of blind Bartimaeus, is the last before Jesus enters the Holy City.

Bartimaeus may be blind, but he sees more clearly who Jesus is than the sighted disciples. In terms of faith, it is the disciples who are blind, and it is Bartimaeus who sees.

Even in his blindness Bartimaeus recognises who Jesus is. When Jesus calls him, his reaction is full of energy and enthusiasm. He throws off his cloak, jumps up and makes his way to Jesus, in contrast to the rather hesitant attitude of the disciples.

Jesus restores Bartimaeus' sight with the words, 'Go, your faith has saved you.' But Bartimaeus does not go; he stays and follows Jesus. Jesus' way has become Bartimaeus' way.

Not only has Jesus restored Bartimaeus' sight, he has also removed the taint of sinfulness which surrounded people with disabilities in those days.

This story is a parable about discipleship.

Bartimaeus is an image of the true disciple. He recognises his blindness and asks for healing. He comes to Jesus with great faith and enthusiasm and not much else. With sight restored he becomes a follower of Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem.

The presence of Jesus in our lives heals and restores us to our true calling as the People of God so that we can truly follow Jesus in our lives.

What Jesus says to Bartimaeus, he says to us, too: What do you want me to do for you?