

The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost  
October 25, 2015  
Proper 25, Year B, RCL

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Job 42:1-6, 10-17  
Hebrews 7:23-28  
Mark 10:46-52

Job answered the Lord, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This is the end of the Book of Job, one of the most difficult books of the Bible to interpret. Job, who is one of the most righteous people in the world is loses his family, his wealth, and his health. His friends come to him and off all the usual explanation for his difficulties, mostly that he must have done something to offend God, whether conscious or not. Job steadfastly asserts his integrity and pleads with God to have a hearing. In asserting his innocence amid all his suffering, Job is also implying that God does not operate in the mechanical way that would fit our limited human understanding. Indeed, at the end of the book, as we heard last week, God’s response to Job is to ask where he, Job, was when God created the universe. That is in the face of the transcendence of God, how can Job think that he can ever understand God’s workings?

In this last passage from the book Job utters the words that we all need to hear, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” All through the book, Job’s visitors—hardly his friends, much less his “comforters”—had been find explanations for why a good person suffers. In contrast, Job has been asking to have a conversation with God. And Job get’s that conversation. And Job is satisfied. He had known of God by reputation, by what others said about God, and now he has met God for himself. Now Job has his own personal relationship with God.

This is absolutely central to our faith as Christians. We hear a lot about God from others. We hear about God in the Bible, we hear about God in our liturgy, we learn about God even from our buildings. We learn about God in our history. We might learn a little about God from preachers—but only a little! But Christianity is not ultimately about information; it is about a relationship with God.

God made us to be in relationships with God and with each other. God made us for love. God went so far as to come to earth and take on human flesh and blood so that God could be among us and we could have a real, human relationship with the Most High.

Today's Gospel reading is one of my favorites. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to face his destiny. He has attracted a lot of attention, and there is much speculation about what will happen when this popular figure arrives in Jerusalem. Some are saying he is the long promised messiah who will throw out the Romans and restore national sovereignty to Israel. If so, then he could be dangerous. The Roman authorities might come down on him and anyone near him at any moment. Given this state of affairs, when the blind man starts calling out "Jesus, Son of David," and thus essentially calling him the messiah, everyone around him becomes frightened and tries to shut him up. "Sshh! You can't go yelling things like that. You'll get us all killed!" The last thing the citizens of Jericho want is a legion of Roman soldiers arriving in force to keep the Pax Romana.

In the midst of all this, Jesus stops and tells them to bring the guy to him. Then he asks either the dumbest question in the world or one of the most profound. A blind beggar comes to him, and he says, "What do you want me to do for you?" Well, what do you think he wants? He's blind! Duhhh! If, like me, you don't really think that Jesus is that obtuse, then let us take another look at what is going on in the story. When Jesus speaks to the blind man, perhaps the

emphasis is more on the personal needs of the beggar. “What do you want me to do for you? Everyone has this political agenda, but the kingdom that I was sent to announce has more to do with creating a whole new way for people to be live with God and with each other. So what can I do for you personally? How would this new kingdom best affect your life? What do you really want most from me?”

One detail that sets Mark’s version of the story apart from Matthew and Luke, in which this story also appears, is that only Mark records the beggar’s name—Bartimaeus. This is not some generic blind beggar created as a foil to show off Jesus’ power to heal. This is a real, particular human being. And that is the power of the story. Jesus, the celebrity is on a freedom march to Jerusalem. The press is all around. There are crowds and shouting and dust. In the midst of it all he stops to forge a personal relationship with one individual. “What do you want me to do for you?”

Furthermore, when Bartimaeus comes face to face with Jesus, he drops the Messianic title and addresses Jesus as “my teacher.” This is now a personal encounter.

Another detail is that the healing is attributed entirely to Bartimaeus’ faith. “Go; your faith has made you well.” Here, I want to make an observation that you will hear me make over and over. In the New Testament, the Greek word for “faith” is “pistis.” It’s best translated “trust.” All too often “faith” connotes an assertion of certain facts to be true, as it “I believe that Jesus rose from the dead. I believe that Jesus is the son of God. And so on. Pistis has more to do with trust. Jesus says to Bartimaeus, “Your trust in me has made you well.”

So what is God’s word to us this morning at St. Michael’s? Jesus asks us, both as individuals and collectively as a congregation, what do you want me to do for you? As an individual, I find this a challenging question. What do I really want? In my heart of hearts, deep

down. Do I want more security? More serenity? Better health? A good career? Good things for my children? Less pain? Do I want things for others? Peace? Justice? A more equitable and secure economic system? Good government? An end to AIDS? An end to hunger? These are all good things, and God wants them, too. Yet underlying all this there is a longing in Jesus question. What do you see in Jesus' eyes when he says to you, "What do you want me to do for you?" You and me. Do you want a relationship with me? And what will that relationship be like? Do we want Jesus to be a kind of ATM for blessings? We ask Jesus for good things, and he gives them to us? Or do we want something more? Something richer and deeper? Are we ready to have Jesus for our friend, our companion, our guide? Like Job, are we willing to hold out for a real relationship with God?

What was the outcome of the encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus? Not the blind beggar, but Bartimaeus, a man with a name. What happened? Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way. Now Bartimaeus could see what he had not been able to see before. For Bartimaeus, Jesus is no longer the political figure, the Son of David; Jesus is now his teacher, and Bartimaeus his disciple. He could see now, and he followed Jesus.

If we tell Jesus what we really want, we may get it. And it may change the course of our lives. Our eyes may be opened, and we will see things we have never seen before. We will become increasingly bold to follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, through sacrifice, and on to glory. We are on a great adventure with Jesus.

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