

30th Sunday B

Faith, Trust, Promise, Nakedness, Transparency

Today we encounter Jesus as He is leaving Jericho.

Hollywood always seems to portray Jericho as this dull, dusty, insignificant little spot on the map. But to the Jews, it was anything but insignificant. Even today it is a place of great memory for our Jewish brothers and sisters. It is significant because it was the first place that the hand of God intervened directly in battle - beginning the fulfillment of His promise to them to give them a land of their own, to establish them as a nation and to be their God and to be their help. The walls of Jericho fell when Joshua and his army obeyed God and marched around the city blowing their trumpets.

It must have taken great faith for an army not to use its strength and weapons - and to trust in God alone to fight their battle. God's people trusted in Him and He delivered on His promise.

God's promise to us in today's readings is beautifully laid out for us by the prophet Jeremiah.

It is a promise of redemption, of joy and celebration, of peace and consolation. The original promise was to Israel, but thankfully, it extends to us for all eternity.

The Lord will gather us from our captivity, our tearfulness and bring us home, into freedom and joy. It is a picture of the exiled Jews returning to Jerusalem, yes, but a vision of our everlasting reward as well.

It is not insignificant that Jesus is mentioned as leaving Jericho. For several weeks now we have been following Our Lord as He travels from place to place, meeting up with people, doing miracles and teaching. Jesus was not just wandering from town to town, but had a specific destination – Jerusalem - where He will be betrayed, crucified and will rise from the

dead. Jericho is his last major stop in Mark's Gospel before the Transfiguration and then to Jerusalem. God is about to fulfill His great promise of Salvation for all peoples, and so it is fitting that the healing of a blind man should happen just outside the city forever linked with God's faithfulness to His people.

Faithfulness.

We are told that it was the faith of Bartimaeus that was the factor in His healing by Jesus.

But what was the blind man's act of faith? Was it his calling out to the "Son of David", thereby recognizing publicly that Jesus was the Messiah? No, it wasn't this. Most Bible scholars will tell you that the blind beggar was probably trying to force Jesus' hand, by publicly "chiding" Him into an act of mercy. I don't know if that was the case, but that might explain people's reaction to his calls for mercy in telling him to be quiet.

And, besides, the scriptures tell us over these past weeks of traveling with Jesus that merely believing is not the same as faith. Peter proclaimed Jesus the Messiah, but lacked the faith needed to accept what that really meant. James and John, believed Jesus was to establish a kingdom, but wanted prestige and power. They believed but lacked the faith needed to get beyond their worldly desires. It was the same with the rich man who went away sad. So believing, no matter how sincere, is not the same as faith. It's very important, but it is not the same thing.

Was it his request, "I want to see?". I don't think so. From a purely practical standpoint knowing what one wants is not even a **basis** for faith. At a minimal level, for example, when I order a sandwich in a restaurant, I ask for it because I want it. It doesn't require an act of faith that I will get it, because it is on the menu. I trust that I will get what I asked for, but, I might not. They might be out of some ingredient and I'll have to change my desire, lower my expectations or go to another place to eat. It was likely, from a human standpoint that Jesus would have known what he wanted,

and He would have understood what mercy meant. From a divine standpoint it is reasonable to believe that Jesus would have known the man's heart and deepest desires, just as He knows ours. It certainly would not be an act of faith to desire for himself what was already on Jesus' "menu" of things He had already been reported doing for others in the past.

The faith of Bartimaeus was in an **action**. What was the action of this blind man? Upon hearing it, we might have missed it. To our eyes and ears it is simple and sublime, but in reality it is one of the most difficult things required of us by faith. Scripture says:

**"Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."
So they called the blind man, saying to him,
"Take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you."
He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus".**

To that blind man, everything he had was in his cloak. It was his blanket, his shade, his warmth, possibly his apron to hold the coins he begged. It was his underwear, his middle-wear and his outerwear. In leaving it behind to come to Jesus, this beggar did what the rich man could not do; he did what Peter, James and John could not, but would eventually do.

Faith. He didn't have it, and when Jesus calls Him, he is given that great gift. Faith. It caused him to do a radical thing. He ran naked to the Savior of the World.

It's interesting to note that when Adam and Eve fell from Grace, the first thing they did was notice they were naked and so they covered themselves. Now that might be taken literally, but it also might be understood figuratively in that they realized what they had lost when they allowed pride to enter into their lives. They now believed they had something to hide, from one another and from God. And humanity has been clothed in pride and ego and distrust and envy and every other thing we can think of ever since.

So my question is: What is it that stops us from running naked to our savior? I don't mean literally naked, but spiritually and emotionally and psychologically naked. What is it that we hide behind when we are confronted by Him? What part of us are we so embarrassed by, that we don't want anyone to see, even God?

Last week, Jesus asked James and John "What do you wish me to do for you?" Their answer was clothed in pride and desire. This week Jesus speaks to Bartimaeus using the EXACT SAME words! "What do you wish me to do for you?" Isn't that interesting? And while the beggar's initial desire may have been simply, to have his blindness cured, to be able to see, it was his request made in FAITH, in Nakedness and Honesty and Trust before God that made the difference in Jesus' response.

Do we think He would do less for us?

The key question for us today, and indeed every day is that of Jesus: "What do you want me to do for you?" Can we answer in faith?