

October 11 2015 Year B Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 22 vs. 22-31

Hebrews 4:14-16

Mark 10:46-52

Sermon *Eyes of Faith*

Among Greek Orthodox Christians there is an ancient prayer which I think is profound in its simplicity. It is known as the Jesus prayer. It has been believed to be in use as early as the 6th century in a monastery of St. Catherine's on Mt Sinai and the words are these, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me." That is the prayer; that is the simple prayer and so I am going to ask you to repeat it as I give you each phrase. This sentence is also called the Prayer of the Heart because it captures very simply the movement of our heart toward God and acknowledges God's great love for us in Jesus. We address Jesus as Lord and we address Jesus as Son of God and in humble awareness of our human weakness we seek God's loving kindness and we plead for mercy that God might look upon us and forgive us. What a beautiful summary this prayer is of our attitude toward God, a longing for a relationship for God and we call out and then in humility we dare to address the Divine One of the Universe, believing the promise that God is merciful. We ask for God's mercy to touch us and restore us.

To pray this kind of prayer is in itself an act of faith. And we get to witness such an act of faith in our gospel lesson today because seated by the roadside near Jericho, was a man named Bartimaeus and because of his blindness was forced to beg for his daily bread. As Jesus and his company walks along past Bartimaeus, we can imagine their preoccupation. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where he knows he is going to face death. No doubt the disciples sense his urgency. They may even be pondering their leader's serious prediction that he must be handed over to the authorities and that he will be killed and then on the third day he will be raised again. In any case the disciples are not in any mood to stop to help a blind beggar. Bartimaeus cries out, they do what they often do, scold him and urge Jesus along. Bartimaeus refuses to be ignored. He recognizes Jesus of Nazareth and his cry tells us how much he knows about Jesus. "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me." The words of Bartimaeus are almost exactly like those of the Jesus Prayer that we shared earlier with you. They are the cries of a faithful heart, calling upon God's divine compassion. Bartimaeus addresses Jesus, as Son of David or in other words as the Messiah. He recognizes Jesus not only as a teacher, not only as a healer but as the chosen One of God. Jesus turns immediately to him and says these simple

words, “Go your way, your faith has made you well.” “Go your way; your faith has made you well.”

The story of Bartimaeus is not so much about healing as it is about faith. Bartimaeus has faith that Jesus is the Son of David and Jesus is the Messiah. It is his act of faith in calling out to Jesus that finally gives him his sight. It is important to note that this blind man that many might have considered out of touch with the world in his day turns out to be the mostly in touch with the reality of God in Jesus Christ. Although he lacks physical sight Bartimaeus possesses spiritual insight in Jesus. Even before Jesus restores him Bartimaeus sees quite clearly that Jesus is the promised one of God. He senses Jesus’ compassion with what I would call are the eyes of faith. In the Bible symbolic language, he is often identified with believing. So it natural with Bartimaeus recognition coincides with his new gift of sight. In the case of Bartimaeus though believing is seeing and his not seeing is in believing but faith has literally opened his eyes of God’s kingdom unfolding all around him. Jesus mentions throughout the gospels and, also reveals God’s kingdom to any of us that good news. And thus in terms of vision lowly Bartimaeus proves a lot more faithful than the disciples themselves. And I think that this story serves as a cautiously tale to all of us as modern day followers, modern day disciples of Jesus. Remembering the relatively blindness of Jesus earliest followers, I think, we ought to consider that we too may be overlooking certain aspects of God’s work amongst us here in this world. We ourselves may require new eyes to notice new areas of need in which God is calling us and recognize God’s revelation in places that we don’t expect—a homeless beggar, a faithful newcomer to church or one of those new strange ideas that somebody might come up with. Jesus is indeed moving in our world today perhaps most moving most of all powerfully in places as I said before where we don’t expect, doing things the way we have always done them may not be good enough when we see with new eyes of faith which Jesus gives to each one of us.

I hate to say it but any where we look at the media these days the evidence is that we are in an election cycle. Has anybody not noticed that? Without becoming partisan way I think I can safely say our country has not been quite as divided as it is now for a good long time. Nor have we faced as many problems for sometime either. There are wars in many places in the world and there are security problems both at home and abroad. There are place to decide where to draw lines where civil liberties are concerned. Not to mention the regular stuff we are always arguing about economy, education, health care, and on and on. In the midst of such crisis, in the midst of such division, we are called as Christian people to try to rise above it as much as we can, to take that step back as I tried to convince gals and guys do in the children’s story a little bit earlier, to see things as much as possible with eyes

of faith. To see a couple of things, if there are creative ways to solve some of the problems that we face or bring people together instead of dividing them so we don't perpetuate the division that we see all around us.

“Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on all of us,” says the Jesus' prayer So as we lift hearts of faith to God, let us pray also for those eyes of faith to keep us continual on our Lord's direction in our ministry as followers of Jesus. And this is my prayer, “Dear God, open our eyes in places of need in the world all around us. Let us open our hearts for our brothers and sisters who are often different than we are. God open us fully to the possibilities which God continually unfolds before each one of us that we might recognize and worship that same messiah that Bartimaeus worshipped and who is alive and working in our world”. I end with a prayer and repeat after me again “Have mercy on us, “Oh Lord and open our eyes Amen.”