



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

“Becoming Whole”

Scripture – Mark 10:46-52

Sermon Preached by The Reverend Thomas R. Stout

Sunday, October 25, 2015

I have always been fascinated by this story. It is a memorable story. There is a clear focus to it. There is humanity throughout, from need, to longing, to resistance, action, resolution, it’s all here. Indeed, I believe our human story is encapsulated in stories just like this one.

Can you imagine, for a moment, not being able to see anything, especially when previously you could see? Just for a moment, close your eyes, and keep them closed. Let’s do it for just 30 seconds. What do you see? What do you hear? What feels different? A long time, isn’t it? With your eyes opened now, what is going on within you and me? What does this feel like? Can you imagine the relief Bartimaeus must have felt? And maybe there was just a little bit of confusion with seeing once more. For myself, this is as close as I can come to being visually impaired. I can only imagine what a total blindness, or one that comes with birth, must feel like. I do not mean here to make light in any way of such a problem, or even to pretend that I understand what it is like to live in such a state. But it has got to be...well, for me it would be overwhelming, especially since I have been sighted for so long. And perhaps that is why, as I have studied this story over the years, my attention has always been on the problem, on the blindness, on what is broken. “Hard” only begins to describe blindness, my friends. Such brokenness has got to be one of the greatest challenges to having a full and faithful life.

But, my study for this sermon took me in another direction. This is, after all, a story of a “healing”. In fact, it is the final healing story in Mark’s gospel. In this story, Bartimaeus gets to see! He has sight. He is healed. He has become whole once more. And the more I looked at this story, the more people I saw becoming whole. Follow me on this for the next few moments. Who all is “becoming whole”?

First, Bartimaeus is made whole. “What do you want?” Jesus asked him. And Bartimaeus was clear: “My teacher, let me see again!” That response tells us that at one point he had indeed been able to see. But, then: GONE! For some reason vision was lost. No wonder this person knew what he wanted. He had had it, it was gone, and Bartimaeus wanted to see again! Low and behold, Jesus does just that. Once Jesus spoke to Bartimaeus, Mark tells us, “Immediately his sight was restored.” This man is so filled with joy do you know what he does? Of course, “he followed Jesus on his way.” That may not seem so remarkable, at first, but in the only other story in Mark (8:22-26) like this one, the person given sight simply goes to his or her home. Not Bartimaeus. He uses his vision to see where Jesus is going, and he goes right after him. Wholeness, I think, includes following Jesus.

But someone else becomes whole in this story. When blind Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was near, what did he call out? He says: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” “Son of David”, that is a new title for Jesus in Mark’s

gospel. It is a regal title. It is the title of a king. And in the very next chapter, which starts after our lesson ends, Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and he is greeted at...

*“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor, David.”*

Bartimaeus completes this gospel’s identification of who Jesus is. He is the “Son of David”. He is royal. Jesus is king. And, of course, that is how Jesus is crucified: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews”. I cannot help but wonder if Bartimaeus’s greeting of Jesus reminded Jesus of his full, complete identity. Jesus is teacher, Jesus is healer, Jesus is Son of Man, and Jesus is also “Son of God”. At the very least, the wholeness of who Jesus is for us is also revealed in this story.

Look next at Jesus disciples and the crowd they are with as this story begins. Here too is brokenness. No one in that crowd wanted to help Bartimaeus get to Jesus, at least not at first. Mark tells us: “Many sternly ordered him to be quiet.” Even the disciples? Apparently. Because Mark is quiet about their behavior. It does give me pause. I do wonder about me and maybe about you as well. Is there anyone for whom I do not have time, for whom I do not speak up? Who do we in the church sometimes not even see in their need and brokenness? But look at the change when Jesus says, “Bring him here.” Mark writes that the crowd says to Bartimaeus: “Take heart!” What a line! And I get the feeling that there is a change of heart in this crowd and in the disciples. “Take heart”, Jesus is calling for you – whoever you are. To know that, to feel that, good people of God, that is to have a sense of wholeness restored inside of each of us – even when we have resisted the call to follow or to help.

Bartimaeus, Jesus, the disciples, the crowd, everyone in this story finds wholeness. And maybe there is one more made whole. Cynthia Jarvis says on just this point:

*...As we call the community to attend to the other’s cry for mercy, whether the other is as distant as Darfur or as close as the closet, we obediently gather a crowd around what God is doing in the world “to make and keep human life human.” The cry of need...becomes the occasion for a glimpse of God’s final intention for creation in ordinary time.**

My friends, God’s intention for creation, I believe, is wholeness. No matter how many times we stray from that path, or are broken by whatever circumstance, God offers again the path to wholeness. We begin to see just that here. Our blindness is lifted. In this story of Jesus healing blind Bartimaeus, all become whole, at least for a while. And whenever we become broken again, guess what Jesus will do? Jesus still calls to us. We have but to tell him what it is we want and wholeness comes yet again.

*Living the Word, Year B, after Pentecost vol. 2, “Pastoral Perspective”, page 216, Cynthia Jarvis.

Prayers of the People*

Remembering the world that God so loves, we bring our prayers to this one who is the Maker of heaven and earth:
Let your will be done.

We pray for the world...Merciful one, restore the fortunes of those who are oppressed, let captives find freedom, and bring refugees to a place of safety and home with songs of gladness and shouts of joy. Let your will be done.

We pray for our community...Sovereign Lord, come and dwell with us, to bless and to keep us; save the strong from the perils of their pride and let those who are weak now find refuge in your presence. Let your will be done.

We pray for loved ones...Merciful God, have mercy upon all who need your help; draw near to them with compassion and give them the faith to be made whole. Let your will be done.

Gracious Savior, keep us watching and working for the promise of your wholeness until all the earth rejoices at your coming again. We make these prayers through Jesus, who taught his followers to pray this prayer: **Our Father...**

*This prayer is a variation of "Prayers of the People" found in Lectionary Aids for 2014-2015, Year B, page 275