

Sunday 27th October 2024; Last Sunday after Trinity Benefice Holy Communion, Oswaldkirk.

Do you ever feel like you are in the dark? Not that someone turned off the lights around you, but that the light within you is no longer shining. I'm talking about those times when you feel lost, and you can't see a way forward, when you are confused, when there is no clarity. At those times the answers and beliefs that once lit your way no longer illuminate and you stumble and fumble your way through life not sure of where you are going. Maybe it's the darkness of fear, or grief, loss, and sorrow have darkened your life, or shadows from your past, shadows of guilt, regret, failure, disappointment.

I wonder if that's what it was like for Bartimaeus in today's Gospel. We often hear this story and think of blindness and seeing in their physical, sensory forms. But what about inward blindness and seeing? This story speaks to us on a deeper level. I think it's a universal story that every one of us experiences even if our sensory vision is perfect. This Gospel passage asks us to not necessarily look outward but to first look inwards and listen to Jesus's question, 'What do you want me to do for you?'

Like Bartimaeus, Jesus asks us that question to prompt us to re-evaluate who we are and where we are. He asks us to ask ourselves if we are sitting on the roadside of life, about those times when it feels like life is passing us by and we aren't getting anywhere, feeling stuck, more like a spectator of life than a participant, feeling exhausted with a lack of wholeheartedness, times perhaps of despair, inertia, or indifference. Maybe it feels like your life has been turned upside down and you've been displaced, that you don't have any place to be and no one to miss you if you're not there. Maybe you've been sidelined by loneliness, been made to feel like the outsider; marginalised and rejected, or offering a voice that others don't want to hear. Maybe on these occasions you may feel like Bartimaeus sitting each day in the darkness begging for someone to take notice of him.

Has this been your experience of life when begging and pleading became the only prayer you had? Because the well of life had run dry and the reserves had run out.

When have you been Bartimaeus? What happened? And what have you done with that experience? Or more importantly, what has it done with you?

No-one chooses to sit in darkness and plead but maybe those times are a necessary part of our spiritual journey. Maybe they are ways in which we mature and come to ourselves. Maybe those times changed how we see God, the world, me, and others maybe they are a gateway to the fullness of life. I am not suggesting that God intends or causes those times. I don't believe that but maybe God does not waste them, that God wastes nothing of our lives – not our blindness, not our roadside sitting, and not our begging.

When that happens, while sitting in our darkness sometimes something begins to come into focus and things start to look different. We catch a glimpse of a new life; we have an insight about God and ourselves and begin to see things in a new light. It may happen in an instant or it may take years.

The Gospel today compels us to consider Jesus's question to Bartimaeus and ask ourselves the same question. What have you learned about yourself from sitting in the darkness and begging? What are you seeing anew or maybe for the first time? In what ways is your seeing changing as you look up from yourself to the light of your Saviour?

What if changing our lives and our world begins with changing how we see? A wonderful and inspiring witness to this is the great hymn writer Fanny Crosby who wrote our last hymn, 'Blessed Assurance'. She knew all about sitting in physical darkness. From six weeks of age until her death shortly before her 95th birthday, she was blind, but she never saw her affliction as anything but a blessing. When she was eight years old, she wrote this verse:

Oh, what a happy child I am, although I cannot see, I am resolved that in this world, contented I will be.

Once a preacher sympathetically remarked to her, "I think it is a great pity that the Master did not give you sight when He showered so many other gifts upon you." She replied, "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind?" "Why?" asked the surprised minister. "Because when I get to Heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!"

Unlike Fanny Crosby, we don't have to wait to get to Heaven, Jesus stands before us every minute of every day bringing light to every darkness.

Thanks be to God. Amen.