

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

October 24, 2021

Psalm 126:1–6 (ESV):

1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”

3 The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad.

4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like streams in the Negeb!

5 Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!

6 He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7–9 (ESV):

7 For thus says the LORD:

“Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
‘O LORD, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.’

8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together;

a great company, they shall return here.
9 With weeping they shall come,
and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back,
I will make them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble,
for I am a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

EPISTLE: Hebrews 7:23–28 (ESV):

23 The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, 24 but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. 25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. 27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. 28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 10:46–52 (ESV):

46 And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” **48** And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” **49** And Jesus stopped and said, **“Call him.”** And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” **50** And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. **51** And Jesus said to him, **“What do you want me to do for you?”** And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” **52** And Jesus said to him, **“Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.**

Sermon 43 – Twenty-Second Sunday After Pentecost

“When the Jesus Calls”

Mark 10:46-52

Dear friends,

What does it mean? This is a question that we can tie ourselves in knots with if we go deeply enough into it, at least I can. On this earth the answers are rarely straightforward until after the fact, and I think this Gospel lesson is a good showcase of this. I'm going to address this plainly, what it says, what Jesus does, but it is a fairly plain event. There's not a lot to this. A guy is blind. Jesus heals him. The end. I'm going to talk about that, but I'm also going to use this to talk about something that occasionally bothers me as I try to be a Christian and deal with God. Jesus heals a blind man. What does it mean? What does it mean for us?

Chapter 10 is a big chapter, as you can see, this is the end of it at verse 52. There's a lot going on in this chapter. Jesus has dealt with the full spectrum of various sins and taught all kinds of things about marriage, love of riches, the use and abuse of power within the church, and Jesus has also tried to teach His disciples about the cross, He's tried to prepare them for the reality that He will be crucified and rise again. At the very end of the chapter, this happens, and I struggle to think of why. Mark doesn't always make it clear why he organizes his book the way he does, and this keys into the uncertainty that we suffer as sinners on this world sometimes. What does it all mean? Is there some big meaning to the fact that Mark ends the chapter this way? To tell you the truth, I don't know.

“46 And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” So far, so standard. Bartimaeus cries out for mercy, and refers to Jesus as the Son of David. Why? Well, the bloodline of the

Messiah was supposed to come from David, that is what the Scriptures promised. Jesus the man as you know was the son of Joseph and Mary, so for this blind fellow to call Jesus the Son of David is a fairly canny insight, ironic considering he cannot see. I'll talk about that more later, but for right now, Bart seems to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah. That Jesus is from God. If Jesus is from God, this Jesus can help him see.

That's not how we're supposed to deal with God, is it? Jesus is our Savior from sin. Jesus is our Redeemer from the fiery pits of hell. Jesus is the one we look to so we can have peace with God. My understanding of piety was that we were supposed to value God, and having a relationship with God, more than we value what God can give or offer us. We're supposed to love God because He's God, not because He gives us this or that thing. That's what I was taught, and that is what I still believe, but passages like this challenge me sometimes and I would challenge you the same way. Lutherans are always harping about forgiveness, it is *the point* of the Christian faith. Having our sins forgiven, having peace with God, going to be with God in heaven. This is what the Christian faith is for. We are rightfully very skeptical with anyone that tells us being a Christian will make our lives great here on Earth. There's many parts of the Bible that tell us otherwise, and this Earth is just too messed up for that to be the case. But I don't want you to ignore the simple straightforwardness of what is happening here. This blind guy doesn't want to be blind anymore. He recognizes (seemingly) that Jesus is God, and knows that God is capable of healing him. So he asks God to heal him, and that quite simply is that.

“48 And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” 49 And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” 50 And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” There is is. Rabbi, let me recover my sight. Not, please forgive my sins. Not, please let me serve you. Not, please can I go to heaven. Not, hey Jesus its enough to know

that you're happy with me. Nope. This guy wants his eyes back, and he asks Jesus for his eyes back. No ifs, buts, maybes. No games. So what does that mean? That God is a big vending machine, we can just push the buttons and He gives us what we want? Of course not, that's silly, that's immature, we all know better.

What does it mean? The last verse may give us a clue. **“52 And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.”** Aha! There it is, guys! Jesus healed Bart so that Bart would believe and follow Him. See, Jesus had a plan for it all along! He wanted to bring this fellow to faith, so that's why He healed his sight. Maybe. That could be. I'm not willing to say no, but where does that leave you and me? We already have faith. If Jesus' ultimate goal is just to make more Christians, to save as many people as possible, what motivation does Jesus have to help us? We're already saved. Do you see the problem with that? It makes Jesus sound like He only cares about racking up a high score of souls saved. That Jesus only cares about getting butts in church pews, He doesn't actually care about the people in those pews.

There is so much truth to it, though. Faith really is what matters most, because only faith can meet our eternal need for forgiveness and everlasting life. Only faith can save us from God's wrath and hell. Only faith can change our hearts. That is what really matters, full stop, and that's what makes this cold, calculating view of God such a temptation. There's a lot of truth to it. I have said to you over and over again that our problems here are not the most important thing, the most important thing is our relationship with God, our need for reconciliation and forgiveness.

I've got needs here. I've got things that need to be fixed, problems only God can solve. I'm sure you do too. This human life isn't beside the point, it isn't incidental, it's not like nothing we do or suffer here matters to God. We know this. So if I'm supposed to be focused on salvation, if I'm supposed to be focused on what God has given me rather than

the things I need here and now, where does that leave me? Where does that leave us? Why even do the prayers we're going to do after this sermon?

What does it mean, when we pray those prayers? Does it mean we're too attached to this life, that we want the best life we can possibly have, and does that mean we're bad Christians? What does it mean when a person who has eternal life and salvation and peace with God and prays for more here on this Earth? Is that being ungrateful? Shouldn't it be enough that we have all those things, why do we pray for health, why do we pray for those who lost jobs, why do we pray for home and family? Shouldn't Jesus be enough?

I don't know. The Scriptures say yes, and the Scriptures say no. Look at this guy. He asked for his eyes back. He didn't need eyes to be saved, he didn't need eyes to enter heaven. But he wants to see. So he asks Jesus to see. And Jesus enables him to see. Paul asked for the thorn in his flesh to be taken away, and that same Jesus said no. My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. Two different men, two different needs, and Jesus said yes to one, and no to the other. Why? What does it mean?

We'll never know. We don't have to know. We think we do, and one of the surest signs that the devil is speaking to you is when you start thinking that you *have* to know, it *has* to be this way. That's making ourselves God. That's second-guessing God, a violation of the First Commandment if ever there was one. Fine, but we need things, and God doesn't always provide them. God allows needs to fester and consume sometimes. Does the very fact that we need something automatically make us bad Christians? Of course not. God wants us to bring our needs to Him. So how do we make sense of all of this?

The key is, as always, the Lord's Prayer. Thy Will Be Done. We need what we need, and sometimes those needs just can't be changed. They can't be ignored, tolerated, or fixed. They're just there. God knows this. He knows what our needs do us, He knows what we truly need, and He knows whether our needs are good ones or bad ones. He knows *when* and *how* we need what we need. God knows you and your life far, far better than you do, He knows parts of you that you had no idea were even there. Bart wanted

to see. For reasons known only to God, He gave Bart that gift. Paul wanted whatever the thorn in his flesh was out of his flesh. For reasons known only to God, He refused to take that thorn away. In either case, God knows best. For you and I, all we can do is ask, and wait for God's mercy. Sometimes it gives a miracle. Sometimes it gives only silence. Sometimes God gives, sometimes God takes. It is important to bring our needs to God, He is God, and He will engineer circumstances where you have no choice but to turn to Him because literally no one else can help you. It is important to accept God's will on your needs regardless of what His answer will be. It seems like those two things are contradictory, well, we humans are contradictory. What is best for us is often what is worst for us, and the things we desperately want are those things that often hurt us. Only God knows what is what in your life today. He does not expect you to. What God expects is for you to be you, a sinner struggling hard to be saint, even in the midst of cross and trial. God expects you to be ungrateful sometimes, and He'll use it. He expects you to be grateful sometimes, and He'll use it. God is wise enough and strong enough to make you what He needs you to be in those moments, regardless of what happens. Thanks be to God, because we never know where it ends up heading. He does. He makes it head where it needs to go. Even if it doesn't make sense.

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Amen.