

A Sermon for Mercy, Peace, Love and Sight

Mark 10:46-52

October 28, 2018

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(note: the original sermon prepared for 10/28/18 was thrown out on Saturday at 10pm)

Just like many of you at some point yesterday, I sat glued to my television watching in horror the unfolding of yet another horrific mass shooting. This time in Pittsburgh as people went to synagogue to pray and bless a young baby boy in a bris. In 20 minutes' time, the worst attack on Jewish people in the history of this country had taken place.

Jesus, son of David have mercy on us.

A representative from a regional Jewish group explained the name of the synagogue: The Tree of Life in Judaism refers to the Torah. It is referenced:

In Genesis 2:9 we hear the story of the Garden of Eden, where a tree grew, called the Tree of Life:

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

In Proverbs 11:30 we hear these words:

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence takes lives away.

Indeed violence has taken lives away.

Perhaps you heard, or perhaps not of the killing of the two African American men at a Kroger grocery store this week. They were killed because they were black. But what seems to have gotten lost in some of the reporting is that the gunman had tried without success to break into a nearby African American church nearby before then, hoping to have wreaked havoc, like another man did in Charleston a few years ago.

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.

Let me be clear. Out of the heart of faith, these acts are an affront to the God we serve. We follow the Prince of Peace, the Bringer of Light and the Incarnation of love. We believe that ALL people are created in the image of God. We believe that all faces: Black, brown, white are needed to reflect the full image of God. And so when our brothers and sisters are killed, we mourn with them and we beg, just as Bartimaeus. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on us.

There is an Iranian Proverb which says: "A blind person who sees is better than a seeing person who is blind."

Blindness is often spoken of in the bible. Also symbolic blindness is a common topic. No one is as blind as those who refuse to see or to understand. The story in our scripture passage of Bartimaeus can be eye-opening, if we have the eyes to see.

Three quick points. First: Last Sunday James and John, the sons of Zebedee, told Jesus that they wanted him to give them whatever they asked. They wanted glory. They wanted prestige both now and for eternity. They wanted positional power to sit at God's right and left hand forever. Their request was not granted. They were blind. In today's passage the direction is reversed. Bartimaeus first yells out for mercy. Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51) His request to see again was granted. And in only the second time in the Gospel, Jesus says it was his faith which made him well. He participated in his healing because he asked for mercy and believed his need would be met.

Second: Bartimaeus's story is also wedged between the Zebedee boys' massive miscalculation on the nature of glory and Jesus' "glorious" entry into Jerusalem on a common donkey. Juxtaposed between these two manifestations of glory is a manifestation of mercy, sought and bestowed. **Those who have ears to hear, know which one to prefer.** We have a power problem in this country right now, which has been the same since the beginning of time...Those who want power and those who fear losing what they have and will do anything to keep it.

And finally, when the man yelled out for Jesus, it was the townspeople...the people who knew him who surrounded him, and who tried to silence him. It's as if they were embarrassed and tried to in a way protect Jesus from this unseemly man. But that's precisely the kind of person Jesus came to serve: those who weren't afraid to speak out the truth and ask for help.

I wonder how often we in the church silence ourselves or others because we're afraid of what it will look like to ask for help. The reality is, We ALL are in need of help.

As one author puts it, "The passage reminds me that the Christian Church is not a society of the wealthy who redistribute their wealth for the sake of the poor, but a community of blind people seeking clarity of sight so that we might in turn help our brothers and sisters see."

Lord, in Your grace, have mercy on us.

So where are we blind and where have we been blind to what is happening right now in our country? Where have we tried to silence ourselves or others around us who have tried to speak out against bigotry and hatred? Or where have we withheld love and forgiveness, harboring anger and hate in our hearts?

If Jesus were to ask you, "What do you want," knowing that he wants you and me to be whole and well, what would you ask for?

It's time to ask to see more clearly, to ask for our blinders to be removed, so that we may love more completely and be more wholehearted.

I've been reading Brene Brown's new book on leadership called, Dare to Lead. She's the NY Times #1 bestselling author whose research has centered around vulnerability and shame.

Her premise is that we need braver leaders and more courageous cultures. We need to have the courage to stay in difficult conversations and "rumble" with one another with vulnerability and whole hearts. To ask questions and stay curious. "Choosing our own comfort over hard conversations is the epitome of privilege, and it corrodes trust and moves us away from meaningful and lasting change." (p.9) You'll hear more on that in future sermons.

So, my friends...stand in hope. We believe in a God who has shown us time and time again that Love wins over hate. We believe that all are created in God's image, and that what God created is good, and beautiful. And we believe that we have been given the opportunity to be co-creators of God's kingdom here on earth.

Jesus, son of David, have mercy on us. Give us whole hearts and make us bringers of peace.

Amen.