

SERMON: 28 October 2018 – Rev Alistair Cowper

“Faith Heals”

(Job 42:1-6, 10-17 and Mark 10:46-52)

There's something significant about the blind man's approach. He is persistent, determined, probably even desperate. He doesn't let the crowd silence him or put him off. When the crowd yelled at him to be quiet, he shouted all the louder, Son of David, have mercy on me!

It was customary for rabbis on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover, to be accompanied by large crowds of people listening to the rabbi teach as he went along. So people would have been offended by the interruption of this blind beggar shouting. I wonder how we might feel, if our Sunday worship was interrupted by the desperate call of someone in need. Would we welcome it or would we move to silence it, like the crowd did that day?

Or would we be like Jesus? Open to the holy distractions calling out to us on the way? Do we have time in our busy lives? I often feel bad, when people say things to me like, you're awful busy; you're too busy to be disturbed. I want to be more open to being distracted by people in need. I'd rather be available, in the way that Jesus was available.

There's something significant about Jesus' response. When he hears Bartimaeus calling, he stops and tells someone nearby to go and tell him to come to him. Jesus allows his teaching to be interrupted for the sake of this one man. He stops what he's doing to give him attention. He ceases his words, the words of God, to connect with this lowly blind beggar. He doesn't walk past as other teachers might do. This tells us something of Jesus' response, that he cares deeply for everyone and wants all to come to him. Everyone matters in God's kingdom. No one is ignored. No one is to be left out in the cold.

The question always is, who are the outcasts we might be missing today? Is it refugees? Is it people with dementia? Is it our children and young people? Is it the people unable to work due to mental health issues? Is it those of a different sexuality than ourselves?

It often surprises me where faith is to be found. It's often in the most unexpected people. And when we risk engaging with the unexpected we

open ourselves to growth. We of faith can learn from others who might at first appear to have no faith but where faith is often found hidden beneath a tough exterior.

The healing of this blind beggar tells us clearly that faith matters. Jesus' response - tell him to come to me - is a test of faith. The man may have been blind but he could still exercise faith. He could get up and walk to Jesus. I wonder that as soon as the man did that, his healing began. And it continued to the next stage of faith when Jesus asks him to put in words what it is he wants Jesus to do for him.

There's something important in Jesus asking this question. Jesus would have known by looking at him what the man needed but he didn't want to decide for the man what he needed. He didn't want to presume on his behalf. He wanted him to say it himself. Only Bartimaeus knew what he wanted Jesus to do for him.

And he makes is very clear, and without hesitating, replies, I want to see! That's what his heart desired most. And notice, when he gets his sight, he immediately uses it to follow the way of Christ. Sight is given to follow the Way. The right response to being able to see is to discover seek a closer walk with Christ. And that is what the heart desires above all.

As St Augustine put it, our hearts are not at rest until they find their rest in God.

I wonder if sometimes people are not sure what it is they desire most in life, let alone what to ask God for. But also, I wonder if we sometimes presume we know what another person needs, whereas it's better to enter a conversation which invites the other person to put in their own words what they want. Like Jesus did here.

Because faith matters. Jesus seems to be giving the man opportunities to exercise faith for himself - firstly, to call out to him, then to get up and walk towards him, and then finally, to put into words what he wanted Jesus to do.

Jesus says in the end, go, for your faith has healed you. He doesn't say, go, for I have healed you, or go, for God has healed you. He says, go, for *your* faith has healed you. And off he goes, and immediately follows Jesus. And right away, Bartimaeus is living a transformed life, for all to see.

This is what discipleship looks like. It begins with our need, goes on to our gratitude and then our loyalty to the cause.

The story tells us that faith heals. I wonder if this means that a big part of healing begins in the mind and in the heart. I think that healing often begins with a change of attitude, a change of heart, a willingness to try something or to trust someone else.

I think this is how God often works with us. That even the change of mind or heart is how he connects with us, it can be how his Spirit moves in us, stirs us, causes groans within us for something more.

John's Gospel tells us that the Spirit is God's way of Jesus speaking to us. Here's what Jesus says, "The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me" (16:15).

I know this healing story happened before Pentecost but I think this is what was happening in Bartimaeus. The Spirit was stirring his heart and pointing him to Jesus, voiced in his cry, 'Son of David, have mercy upon me!'

And I wonder that this is the same Spirit who stirred Job's heart; who, through all Job suffered, was revealing himself to Job; so much so, that Job says at the end of his trials, 'up until now, I'd only heard about you God, but now I have *seen* you with my own eyes, you are God, and with you nothing is impossible, you can do anything'.

What is the Spirit saying to you today? What is He stirring in you? What might He be inviting you to call out for? What do you want Him to do for you? Is he inviting you to come closer?

Or through whom is He speaking to you? Is He in the voice of someone you wouldn't expect? Can we make time to stop and listen?

Let us pray,
Lord,
Open my eyes, to see you, my ears, to hear you.
I give to you, my mind, my heart, my words, my hands.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.