

*What do you want Christ to do for you?*

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, Year B—27 October 2024

Revd Rob Miners

*Mark 10.46-52*

Some years before my ordination, we had a lady from Melbourne provide the music for our church service in Albury. This lady was totally blind and had been since birth. She played the guitar and sang absolutely beautifully. After the service and lunch, we took her and her husband out to the Hume Weir. I have never forgotten her husband's description of the hills, the clouds, the colours, the shapes, the heights. Now, I'm a person who has always enjoyed the beauty of nature, that is God's creation. And often I think we with vision often just accept what's before our eyes and don't really see the sheer beauty God has given us. And even fifty-odd years later I look at creation very differently now and see it in the way that the lady's husband had actually described it to us.

So, to today's Gospel.

Jesus was on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem. He knew he was about to die. He met a man who showed many of the elements of faith that are so important for those who would reach out to the Lord for healing. And the story ends happily with Jesus saying to Bartimaeus, "Go on your way, your faith has made you well."

When we look at that Gospel passage of today, what can we learn about the elements of faith as we see them expressed in Bartimaeus? He was expectant for healing, persistent in seeking help, proactive in seeking help, and fourthly he had his priorities in order and it's under those four headings that I'll speak this morning.

*Expectant for healing.*

Bartimaeus was a candidate for healing. He had a right attitude to Jesus. He cried out to Jesus, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Son of David was a description given to the Messiah who was to come. It may have been that he'd heard of the healing miracles of Jesus and had heard that the blind man had been made to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear. The Jews believed that the Messiah would do those things when he came to fulfil many of the Old Testament prophecies.

Now, someone called Jesus was doing precisely those things. Bartimaeus may have recognised Jesus as this long-promised Messiah. He also had a right attitude to healing. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He didn't challenge Jesus to meet his need on the basis of his status, nor on the basis of his contribution to society, nor did he insist on his rights as a disadvantaged person. No, he realised that all he could do was to humbly ask that Jesus might be merciful to him.

As you and I reach out to the Lord for healing or blessing, we can only do so on the basis of God's mercy. It's an act of his grace when he meets our need. It's not something that we have deserved. We can ask confidently on the basis of his mercy and love, and because of his promises in his word to answer prayers. We can never ask arrogantly, thinking that he owes it to us.

*He was persistent in seeking help.*

We see that persistence in Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus was crying out in verse 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. But those around him were not too impressed.

In our modern language, they told him to shut up and be quiet. And a blind man is very vulnerable in a large crowd, especially if they don't like what he's doing or saying. But a desperate person doesn't give up.

He continued crying out, and many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. "He cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me." And it continued on for some time, the man crying out. And the crowd were telling him, "Shut up, be quiet." Nothing was going to prevent him from making his need known to Jesus. Persistence is needed to draw on all the resources we have in Jesus.

We live in a world where everything is instant. Coffee, pictures, communications, emails. Instant satisfaction and gratification. We may have those around us who discourage us when we reach out for blessing or healing. But if we are desperate enough, we'll make the effort to keep on reaching out to him.

The Lord has his own timetable, which may be a little different to ours. And his timetable is always the best. But we persist until the answer comes.

*Proactive in seeking help.*

Taking advantage of the opportunity, in verse 49, Jesus stopped him and said, call him. And they called the blind man, saying to him, take heart, get up, he's calling you. This was the moment of truth.

As he sat on the ground with his beggar's cloak around him, he made a choice. Bartimaeus put his decision into action. He stepped out in faith.

Verse 50, in throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Think of the security that his outer garment was to him. It sheltered him from the heat and the cold. He probably spread it out to catch the coins thrown in pity to him. His whole future was in many ways wrapped up in that garment. To cast it aside as a blind man was almost considered sheer stupidity.

But nothing was going to hinder Bartimaeus from coming to Jesus for healing. He must have believed that his security would now rest in Jesus. That's called walking by faith, not by sight. He leaves his security behind and begins to walk by faith. To receive the blessing, he believes his coming. He was being asked to do what he had never seen done before. He may have heard about Jesus' miracles and healings, but he'd never personally seen them. Nevertheless, he believed in the power of Christ to heal him. What a contrast when you realise that the scribes and Pharisees had seen with their own eyes some of Jesus' miracles, but still wouldn't believe.

I wonder how willing we are to obey the word of the Lord to us and to step out in faith and to claim the promises of God in his word.

*Priorities in order.*

He knew what he wanted from Jesus.

Jesus asked him, what do you want me to do for you? Jesus' question to him may have seemed strange. Here standing before him was a blind beggar. Surely it was obvious what was needed. He needed to receive his sight so that he could live a normal, independent life.

Why did Jesus ask? Because he wants us to know in our minds what we really want. Bartimaeus' priorities were in order. His receiving his sight would open the door to so much more. So he was honest in requesting, "Master, let me receive my sight." Jesus spoke, go on your way, your faith has made you well.

It was also a risk to walk away from Jesus. If he walked away still blind, he could have been mocked and ridiculed for thinking that anything could be done for him. He could have become angry and resentful that his healing hadn't come immediately. But as he obeyed that word to "Go", he was healed. Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way. And it requires a step of faith to experience in his body what he believed was possible from the Lord.

And that's one of the reasons why we encourage people at healing services to indicate what they want prayer for as they come forward for healing. It's that step of faith. He knew what he wanted from Jesus.

He kept following him on the way. That is, he became a disciple, a follower, as he literally followed Jesus on the way. If Jesus had brought light and meaning and purpose into his life, then he would follow him from that point on. He wanted to remain in the will of God for him as he praised God for his wonderful healing. I don't believe for one moment that God heals us and then isn't concerned with what we do from that point on in our lives. I believe he wants us to be fulfilled by being able to come to know him in a deeper way and to know his will for our lives and by his grace and help to do it.

In 2014, I was diagnosed with a nasty graze on the outer wall of my stomach growing internally. A week or so before surgery, I attended the healing service at St John's Reid. When they called for people to come forward for healing prayer, I was the first up the aisle, the skid marks permanently marked on the tiles as the soles of my shoes endeavoured to gain traction. Bishop Ben Kawashi of the Diocese of Jos was the one who prayed for me, together with his wife who prayed for me in tongues. At the end of the prayer, he gave me a little push in the chest and proclaimed in a loud voice, "Your cancer has gone."

And after the op, everything fine. No cancer cells.

God does still heal today.