

Puy de Serre – Last Sunday after Trinity 2021

Jer 31 7-9; Heb 7 23 end; Mk 10 46 end

We have three wonderful readings today. Jeremiah reminds us of the Father heart of God who calls His scattered people back to Himself. Hebrews speaks of Jesus, our great High Priest, whose once and for all sacrifice, offers assures of God love and forgiveness when we put our trust in Him. But today I want to concentrate on our gospel reading, such a vivid description, you can almost see, hear and perhaps – if you've been to Jericho – even smell it.

Bartimaeus is blind. So he is an outcast. Most people would judge him to have somehow deserved his world of darkness, remember John who tells us in his gospel of those who ask Jesus, 'who sinned this man or his parents that he should be born blind?' He has no means of living other than to beg, no way of knowing exactly what is going on, but he has, somehow, heard about Jesus – perhaps about His healing ministry – and he calls out, wanting His mercy. This draws attention to him, an unusual event, I would think, as most people would probably normally walk past him without a second glance. But he is told to be quiet. We can imagine people either embarrassed or angry at this disturbance he's making. But in no way deterred he continues, shouting out even louder, until Jesus calls him.

Jesus Himself must have passed Bartimaeus by. Did He see him or was he hidden by the crowd? Did He hear his first shouts or were they drowned by the voices of those telling him to be quiet? We don't know but Jesus stops and tells the crowd to call him. He gives the crowd, - was it the disciples who earlier in the chapter have been trying to prevent people disturbing Jesus by bringing children to Him to bless? – or just those following Him? –the chance to think again, telling them to go and call him. Now they encourage the previously ignored or even despised beggar to go to Jesus.

There is an explosion into action. Bartimaeus throws aside his cloak, jumps to his feet and makes his way to Jesus. Imagine the crowd holding their breath. What will Jesus do? Will they see a miracle?

Jesus asks simply what he wants Him to do for him? Just as He asked James and John earlier in the chapter when they came wanting to sit on His right and left when He came into His kingdom.

There is no hint of judgment or rejection, and, unlike His response to James and John, no conditions attached to His response. He simply suggests He can, and is willing to, do things for him. He heals him in response to his faith and another is added to His followers.

What does this gospel reading say to us today? I wonder which of the characters you identify with most and how you would respond to Jesus asking you, 'What do you want me to do for you?' At first I felt one of the crowd, a disciple, following Jesus where He leads –something I have tried, with His help, to do for years. But then I was challenged by how easy it is for my discipleship to focus too much on me personally, what Jesus has done for me, what I try do for Him and His church, how best I might share His love. And I wondered about how many people like Bartimaeus I pass by unnoticed, or even worse whose cries I ignore because they disturb my own walk with Jesus.

The Covid pandemic reminds us we are members together of the human race, all facing the same challenge but with vastly different resources. In spite of all the very real fears and frustrations, suffering, deaths and grief we are living through, we count amongst the most fortunate people on the planet and perhaps now is the time for us to stop and listen to the cries of those who cry out to God for mercy.

Covid challenges us to think globally. No one is safe, until everyone is safe. We have all heard this said and it makes sense, but this statement only serves to underline the huge problems our world faces. There are many pandemics, some more devastating and longstanding than Covid. Throughout the world there are groups of people crying out for help, suffering from poverty – over 2 billion

people have less than \$10 a day to live on, leading to starvation, reduced life expectancy and high infant mortality, nearly 1/3 of the world's population still lacks access to clean water and proper sanitation with all the problems that causes, especially when fighting infections like Covid with very limited or no health care. 700 million children have no opportunities for education. The effects of climate change are driving people from their homes as sea levels rise and flood them or unpredictable rainfall makes it impossible for them to grow food for themselves and their families. Add to this the effects of warfare and hatred displacing countless refugees so desperate to find a better future they are prepared to risk their lives and those of their children to do so. And they all cry out to Jesus for mercy. They are not responsible for their plight – in some cases, like climate change, it is more likely we are. They just happen to have born in different, less fortunate parts of the world from us. We too often ignore them, too caught up with our own concerns, and can wish them to be silent when their voices challenge our comfortable existence. When we do this, and we all do, it is we who are blind and in need of healing.

But the shouts are getting louder and should not be ignored. I believe Jesus loves everyone and calls all those in need to Him. His call to us is to help them meet with Him so He can ask them what they want Him to do for them. Health and safety, food on the table, clean water to drink, homes to live in and hope for the future, freedom from fear, persecution and rejection. Simple requests but how many millions of our fellow inhabitants of this earth would rejoice if they had them today.

So perhaps we may consider how we would respond to Jesus should He ask us the same question He addressed to Bartimaeus. 'What do you want me to do for you?' I would begin by saying, 'Lord, forgive me for being too caught up in my own world to heed the cries of those in need. Give me ears to hear and eyes to see them as you do, give me a heart of compassion like yours, give me lips to speak out on behalf of those who have no voice of their own, give me hands to give of the riches you have given me and the willingness to accept less that they may have more. Lord have mercy. Help me to reject my need for status and importance, my assumed right to a comfortable existence and give me the will to

follow your example of service and sacrifice so that I may be a channel of Your love and to know that in reaching out to those in need in your name I am doing your will. Amen