

October 24, 2021  
Lectionary 30, Year B  
The Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost  
Mark 10:46-52  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA  
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### Who is Blind and Who Can See?

I have a geography and a timeline in my head of Jesus' journeys and, when I was preparing for this sermon, I was reminded that it was wrong.

Partly, it's the lectionary's fault but mostly it's the fault of the church year, because the lectionary, which, in part was designed to support the themes and seasons of the church year tells some of the story of Jesus' life out of order.

For example, the story of Jesus' transfiguration is our gospel reading on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. The Sunday after the Ash Wednesday, tells the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, which happens right after his baptism, at the very beginning of his ministry, while the transfiguration happens in the middle of his ministry. In my head, that is the point at which Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem and begins his journey there.

But then the gospel reading, at least in Year B, the year that our gospel readings come from the gospel of Mark, we have Jesus' first passion prediction, the first time that he told his disciples what was going to happen to him, that he was going to be betrayed and suffer and die and on the third day, rise again, on the third Sunday in Lent, two weeks after we read the story of the transfiguration in worship.

But that first passion prediction actually happens in Mark's gospel before the transfiguration, when Jesus was in Caesarea Philippi.

Of course, I'm not that far off, because the transfiguration, which happens in Mark chapter 9, verses 2-7, is followed by two more passion predictions, in Mark 9:30-32 and Mark 10:32-34.

But I've always pictured Jesus moving south after his Transfiguration, with a single-minded focus on the mission that he has there, to place himself in the hands of human beings who reject the presence of Emmanuel, and who will kill God with us to maintain their own power, to maintain the status quo, to maintain empires that human hands have built rather than embracing the kingdom that God has promised.

Last week I had us looking at Mark chapters nine and ten as one story. I invited you to see it; its themes, its stories, its conflicts as connected, telling one big story.

I went back and reread it again in preparation for this week's sermon and I found out that in a small way, the geography that I had in my head was a little off.

The bible never names the mountain where Jesus experienced his transfiguration, but tradition has said that the mountain was Mt. Tabor, which is located in the Galilee, near the Jordan River.

If that is the case, then, instead of moving south immediately after his Transfiguration, the way that I've always pictured it, Jesus actually went back to the north, to Capernaum after his transfiguration, where we find him in Mark 9:33, talking with his disciples about their argument about which one of them was the greatest.

But then, his journey south did begin, taking him from Capernaum and the Galilee to Judea and then on the road to Jerusalem, which took him where we find him in today's gospel reading, in Jericho, which is just a short walk to Jerusalem.

During the past month of gospel readings, which have all come from chapters 9 and 10 of Mark, Jesus has spent most of his time teaching publicly or privately and sometimes debating with his disciples or the religious leaders or other people who questioned him. But today, we find him healing; healing the only person who is named in chapters 9 and 10 of Mark's gospel other than the disciples. He is healing a blind man, named Bartimaeus, which actually means son of Timaeus. And in this

healing of Bartimaeus, you can see echoes of everything that has happened in chapters 9 and 10 so far.

Bartimaeus, because he was blind, would have had no power within his community, he would have had no ability to support himself, other than by begging. He would have had no ability to start his own household. He would have been shut out of any inheritance that he might have received. Like the women who Jesus tried to protect in his teaching on divorce in Mark 10:7-12 and like the children who Jesus celebrated and embraced in Mark 9:36-37 and Mark 10:13-16, Bartimaeus would have been one of the most vulnerable people in his society, completely dependent on the compassion of others for his survival, probably sometimes experiencing that compassion, but probably also experiencing the cruelty that human nature often dishes out to those who are vulnerable.

But in his story, Bartimaeus, who would have known that he was the lowest of the low in his society did what very few others had done in Mark 9 and 10. He addressed Jesus.

So far, the only people other than his disciples who have addressed Jesus in our gospel readings in these chapters, have been those who would have been at the pinnacle of their society, the Pharisees, religious leaders who would have been looked up to and considered to be authority figures in their society, who in Mark 10:2, questioned Jesus about divorce in order to test him, and the rich man, who by virtue of his wealth, would have had status in his society, who in Mark 10:17, questioned Jesus about what he had to do to inherit eternal life and then didn't like Jesus' answer.

Bartimaeus like the Pharisees and the rich man called out to Jesus, but, in contrast with the Pharisees and the rich man, he called out to him not to question him but to ask to receive something from him; to ask for mercy.

In Mark 9 and 10 the disciples asked things of Jesus too. They asked for his approval when they tried to stop someone who was doing acts of healing and

mercy in his name, even though he wasn't one of Jesus' "official" disciples. James and John asked for him to seat them at his right hand and his left hand when he came in glory.

In both of these requests the disciples were seeking self-aggrandizement. They wanted to be the ones in the seats of power. They wanted to be the ones who had control of Jesus' healing gifts, the ones who decided who could heal and who could receive healing. When they asked things of Jesus, they asked so that they could have more power, more recognition, more glory for themselves.

But when Bartimaeus called out to Jesus seeking his sight, seeking his own healing, he wasn't trying to set boundaries around Jesus about who Jesus could help, who Jesus could bless, who Jesus could heal. He was just coming to Jesus with his own and honest need, and letting Jesus act as he chose.

When Bartimaeus called out to Jesus he did it loudly and many people tried to silence him; to keep him from seeking Jesus' help, just as the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus; to keep them from receiving his blessing in Mark 10:13.

But just as Jesus was indignant with his disciples for trying to keep the children away from him, when he heard Bartimaeus calling to him, he stopped and called him forward.

So Bartimaeus got up and left his cloak on the ground behind him.

For Bartimaeus, his cloak might have been his only possession, all he had to shelter him from the elements, all he had to sleep on at night, all he had to collect the alms that people gave him as he begged. But the text says that he threw it off as he went to Jesus.

In Mark 10:21, Jesus told the rich man who wanted to inherit eternal life, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

But the rich man went away shocked and grieving and we never find out what happened to him next. He had many possessions and the idea of leaving behind his unnecessary abundance broke his heart.

In contrast, Bartimaeus left behind his deeply needed cloak, his one possession, in order to go to Jesus.

In Mark 10:35, James and John asked something of Jesus. They said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”

And Jesus said, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

What they wanted was to sit, one at his right hand and one at his left in his glory. This was not something that Jesus could grant.

But when Bartimaeus approached Jesus and Jesus asked him what he wanted of him, Bartimaeus asked only for his sight. And Jesus gave it to him, saying “Go; your faith has made you well.”

And Bartimaeus could see. The text says that immediately he regained his sight. But I think that perhaps Bartimaeus was the only one who could see in the whole story. Bartimaeus would have been looked down on by his society. But in our gospel reading for today, he is the model of faith.

He is often called blind Bartimaeus, but even before Jesus healed him, he was the one who understood Jesus more clearly than so many others who could physically see him.

Knowing he needed mercy, Bartimaeus asked Jesus for mercy. He trusted in Jesus’ compassion and didn’t imagine that it was something he could earn. He trusted in Jesus’ character, that mercy was something that Jesus would freely give. He didn’t let his lowly position in his community keep him from seeking the Messiah’s help.

Bartimaeus’s story is the grand finale of chapters 9 and 10 of Mark’s gospel. He was blind and yet he saw Jesus and knew him for what he was, saw him for

who he was. Savior, messiah, healer, the merciful one, the one who was to be followed.

Maybe you're wondering what all of this has to do with the geography that I was talking about at the beginning of this sermon.

Well, in spite of Jesus one detour north to Capernaum, from the time that he first told his disciples where he was headed, to Jerusalem, where he would suffer and die, from the moment that he came down the mountain where he experienced his Transfiguration, Jesus was heading for Jerusalem. He was heading for the place where his ministry, where his power, would come up against the powers of this world, and where the powers of this world would seem to be victorious over him for a time.

And now we find him in Jericho, just a short walk away from Jerusalem.

The next thing that happens in the gospel of Mark, if we just turn the page, is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

He is welcomed into Jerusalem with celebration and joy and shouts of praise. But of course, those cries of joy, soon enough turned to shouts of "Crucify!"

Jesus knew that the way that he walked was not one of greatness or glory or at least not immediate greatness or glory. And so many of the people that he interacted with seemed to want it to be just that, a way that led to power and earthly glory.

They wanted to keep their own power and to control Jesus. They wanted to hang onto their worldly goods and yet attain the otherworldly kingdom of God. They wanted to treat Jesus like a scarce commodity to be rationed and doled out only to those who they decided were worthy. They wanted Jesus to seek the world's glory and not the glory of God.

And so, they didn't listen when Jesus talked about his suffering and dying. They didn't listen when Jesus talked about sacrifice and compassion. They didn't listen when Jesus talked about the road that he was on. They didn't see that he was

traveling the road to Jerusalem. They didn't understand what would happen to him there.

But Bartimaeus, who spent most of our gospel reading for today blind saw more clearly than anyone else.

When Jesus healed Bartimaeus he said to him, "Go, your faith has made you well." I wonder if Jesus expected Bartimaeus to turn away from him, to take another road, to travel another path, with his newly restored sight.

But instead, Bartimaeus followed him on the way. The way that Jesus was on, the way of sacrifice, the way of suffering, the way of death, and ultimately, the way of salvation and glory.

Of all of the people in chapters 9 and 10 of Mark, Bartimaeus, who might seem to be most to be pitied, is shown here to be a model of discipleship, a model of faith, faith that sees Jesus for who he is, the compassionate one, the merciful messiah, the son of David.

He saw that Jesus was one who would hear him and see him. He saw that Jesus was one who would heal him. And he saw that Jesus was one to be followed, even to Jerusalem. Amen.