

The Universal Cry

Mark 10:46-52

Delivered by the Rev. M. Dion Thompson on Oct. 28, 2018

Today's gospel is one of my favorite stories because it gives voice to the universal cry in all of us. It describes the sacred encounter between ourselves and Jesus Christ, and the magnificent response that calls us into new life.

Who hasn't found themselves in the darkness of despair or grief, isolated by sorrow, confused by the chances and seeming injustices of life that can come upon us with a sudden and devastating power? In a sense we are all Bartimaeus, and we are the fickle crowd, and we are the bearers of Christ's love and mercy, all of us brought together by the universal cry that is embedded in our liturgy: Lord have mercy; Christ have mercy; Lord have mercy.

On the dusty road of Jericho a voice calls out: "Yie Davied, 'lesou, eleison me!" Hear him shouting, voice carrying above the crowd whose response is filled with condemnation: Siopao! Siopao! Shut up! Be quiet! Why must this blind beggar embarrass us?

They are like those who cannot handle our pain. They cringe when we draw near. And, they are like those voices in our heads that say: Oh, now that things are tough you want to call on Jesus. Give me a break. You haven't been to church in a month of Sundays and I can't remember the last time you were on your knees in prayer. They speak as if salvation was something to be earned, when we know it is a grace-filled gift from God.

They scold. But Bartimaeus does not stop shouting. The universal cry must be heard. "Yie Davied – Son of David – eleison me – Have mercy on me." The plea comes to us in the tongue of ancient Greece, and in the words of one of those old sorrow songs you sometimes hear. The words are different, but the feeling is the same: "Pass me not, O gentle Savior. Hear my humble cry. While on others thou art calling, do not pass me by."

Jesus, son of David, do not pass me by. But stop and hear my humble, universal cry, sometimes shouted, sometimes whispered, a mantra on the lips of my wounded soul: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Bartimaeus will not be denied. Sitting there on the Jericho road, he teaches us the need for persistence, the need to silence those voices inside and outside that all too often seek to stifle our prayer, as if we were not worthy of the Lord's mercy, and that our prayer was a failed enterprise.

Yet, St. Paul tells us to pray without ceasing. In the soul's dark night – Pray. Never mind what the voices say. Pray anyway. Pray in hope. Pray in faith. Pray in the sure conviction that you will be heard and that the moral arc of the universe does indeed bend toward justice and love, not injustice and hate.

In today's gospel Jesus hears the universal cry and calls Bartimaeus to him, just as he calls each and every one of us, saying: "Come to me all of you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give

you rest.” This I offer to all of you, not just the holy ones, the devoted ones and every-Sunday-in-Church ones, but also the nones, the Christmas-and-Easter ones. All of you. Come to me.

The connection has been made. We have made our prayer and the Lord has responded with a piercing question that cuts through all pretensions.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

Is this a trick question? Last week James and John sought their own glory. Earlier this week I surely would have been tempted to ask for the winning Mega Millions ticket, or the winning Powerball ticket. And it wouldn’t have had to be the only winning ticket. I’m more than willing to share. And, I would have given God all the glory. Today, my request would be different.

But our friend Bartimaeus does not hesitate. He has prayed long and hard for this moment. Lord, he says, let me see again. Open my eyes to see the world as it is, not through rose-colored glasses or ones that skew toward the negative. But let me see clearly.

And what does the Lord say? “Go! Your faith has made you well.”

Given new sight, Bartimaeus joins Jesus in that glorious procession making its way to Jerusalem. But that is not the end of his story, or ours. For this procession ends at the cross. Yet that, too, is not the end. For with crucifixion comes resurrection. And we are called to crucify our blindness, whatever it may be, so that a new and clear vision can be resurrected in our hearts.

Bartimaeus’ story is a journey of faith, from darkness to light, from blindness to sight. And it begins with a humble, human cry: Lord, have mercy on me.

Let me see the world as it is, then inspire me, fill me with your grace and love so that I may do my part to make it what you want it to be.

Amen.

Post-Sermon Quote: “Our vocation is to ignite conflagrations of love and forgiveness all around us. God’s light intends to be refracted through our being: it shines upon us not only for our own benefit, to dispel our darkness, but to stream through us and beyond us.” Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis, Fire of Mercy – Heart of the Word, Vol. 2.