

Leaving Jericho
Psalm 34:1-8; Mark 10:46-52
Stewardship Dedication

Psalm 34:1-8

¹I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

²My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.

³O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

Mark 10:32-34; 46-52

³²They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid.

He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³saying,

“See, we are going up to Jerusalem,
and the Son of Man will be handed over
to the chief priests and the scribes,
and they will condemn him to death;

then they will hand him over to the Gentiles;
³⁴they will mock him, and spit upon him,
and flog him, and kill him;
and after three days he will rise again.”

⁴⁶They came to Jericho.

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.”

⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” ⁵²Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.”

Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

The Sermon

Looking into the future can be a scary thing sometimes, depending on the circumstances—it can feel daunting, challenging, intimidating, overwhelming.

There was a couple whom I had first come to know in their grandparenting years. The wife had had a decades-long ailment that she

had fought with astonishing courage and strength. It had finally burned itself out, but it had taken a profound toll on her health and mobility.

They were English, and he spoke with a dignified reserve and didn't like to get emotional. And sometimes, when she was out of earshot, he'd kind of look to the side and say, "It doesn't do much good to look too far down the road."

Looking into the future can challenge our optimism, our resilience, our hope.

You hear versions and variations of that all the time, in regard to
the condition of our political discourse,
our impact on the natural environment,
the state of a world
that always seems to be ready to spin out of control,
even the future of the Christian Church.

Some of you have seen more cycles of this than I have; it's usually told something like this: the generation of church leaders just before us had it almost right; we came along to correct what wasn't quite there and take it one step further; and the generation right after us are nice people, but, ehh...

Every generation tends to see itself in the middle of that sandwich.

When you were younger, what did you picture for the future, in terms of your own life, or the future of the world, or the future of the whole Church, or the future of your church?

How bold was the future that you dreamed about?

How bold is your vision of the future now, in terms of what we can do to share the good news with the people around us, and with the whole world?

If you, as a disciple of Christ, could participate in moving the world toward a more ideal future, what would you like to be able to do in order to help make that happen?

I suppose the real question I'm asking is: what does it mean to follow Jesus, and to be an apostle of the Good News in this world?

The next major town down the road, about 12 miles to the southwest of Jericho—about one day's journey away—was Jerusalem.

Somewhere, at that moment, in Jerusalem, some laborer was preparing a space for a wooden cross.

That laborer had no idea who would be crucified there, or when, or for what crime; couldn't have known that when the next cross was eventually erected there, the intersection of the vertical post and the horizontal beam would become the defining intersection at the center of the whole universe.

Meanwhile, as they came into and passed through Jericho, neither the disciples traveling with Jesus nor the crowd of people following close behind could see that far down the road, any more than the blind guy sitting on the roadside begging for alms.

Maybe only Jesus can see that far ahead—and this is not the first time he's tried to tell the disciples about it.

The first time he had said it, around Caesarea Philippi in northern Palestine, they couldn't accept it (8:31-33), to the extent that Peter actually tried to rebuke him.

The second time, trying to pass unnoticed through Galilee so he could try again to get them to hear and understand, "they did not understand what he was saying, and they were afraid to ask" (9:30-32).

This time, they've come down near the southern end of the River Jordan where it feeds into the Dead Sea. Jesus had been walking ahead, on the way to Jericho, and the disciples walking behind him were in amazement—the Greek word is *ethambounto*, they were *astonished*.

After three years of intimate discipleship—three years and a thousand miles into this journey up and down the Palestinian landscape, the disciples are still amazed.

Not exactly the same for the rest of the crowd who are tagging along: they're walking in *fear*.

*They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem,
and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed,
and those who followed were afraid.*

I wonder if any of them were saying, to themselves and each other, “It doesn't do much good to look too far down the road”?

What were they afraid of?

That the miracles would eventually run out?

That Jesus' endless love and compassion would keep upending the expected results of things until they finally got themselves in hot water?

That by getting closer and closer to Jerusalem, they were risking that terrible moment when the call of Jesus to love unconditionally inevitably collided with the state's plans for hoarding surpluses and keeping certain populations under control?

Having gone through Jericho one last time, Jesus is on the way to what he is going to do for all creation in Jerusalem.

The man calling out to him from beside the road on the way out of town was called Bartimaeus; literally “son of Timaeus,” and Mark clarifies that he *was* in fact the son of Timaeus.

The name Timaeus most likely comes from the Hebrew word *timaó*, which means, “highly prized.” But if Timaeus was highly prized, Bartimaeus was a long way from the esteem of his namesake.

Due to the circumstances of his life and the limited options of the time and place he lived in, he was known for three things:

- for being Timaeus’s son,
- for not having the gift of sight,
- and for being a beggar on the street.

When he heard who it was who was coming by, he called out to Jesus. And many people sternly ordered him to be quiet. Nevertheless, he persisted.

Maybe, even in his blindness, he could see further than anyone else.

And Jesus gave him sight.

I once came across some footage on Youtube of a teenager with colorblindness being given a pair of special glasses through which for the first time he can see in full color. He puts them on, and overwhelmed, he says to his family in astonishment, “Is this the real world? Is this actually what it really looks like?” And he bursts into tears, and the people behind the camera are crying, and somebody says, “What’s it look like?” but he’s too overcome to answer.

It turns out there are a bunch of similar videos online of colorblind people able to see the full spectrum of color for the first time, overcome with emotion at the beauty of it all.

They do appear to be all sponsored by the company that makes those glasses, and I don't know: maybe it's all baloney, and they're just good actors and I'm just a sucker for a tear-jerking moment on Youtube. But that tearful, speechless reaction is kind of what I imagine happening to Bartimaeus.

When Jesus opens your eyes and you can finally see, there are still challenges, and darkness and cruelty, sorrow and hatred and pain; but you can see them and everything else in the context of the indescribable beauty of the universe; the astonishing, mysterious gift of life and how precious it is for all people and all creation; the sweeping and breathtaking power of love to transform even the most apparently hopeless situations and the blindest, most destitute people.

As soon as Bartimaeus received his sight, he began to follow Jesus. Just in time for Jesus' last journey.

As Jesus left Jericho to set out for the supreme sacrifice he would make in Jerusalem, Bartimaeus came with him, leaving behind the world where he had been only known as a more or less helpless beggar, condemned to a life of being unfavorably compared to the father who came before him.

As Jesus goes to give his life to save the world, the newest disciple goes to dedicate his life to doing whatever a disciple can do to bring light and vision and hope into the world, as only someone who had been where Bartimaeus had been could truly do.

What does it mean to follow Jesus, and to be an apostle of the Good News in this world?

Jesus invited them to be fishers for people (1:17), casting the net as wide as it could go.

He sent them out to proclaim good news, and gave them authority to cast out demons (3:14-15; 6:7).

He welcomed them to retreat to a deserted place by themselves to rest a while and finally have a moment of leisure (6:31). But when vast numbers of people came and Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd (6:34), he said to the disciples, “You give them something to eat” (6:37).

What does it mean to be a disciple?

A friend of mine was just telling me about one of his mentors, a guy who had been in the United States Navy as what they called a “frogman.” His job had been to go down into the deep water and search for, find, and dismantle mines.

The disciples are frogmen and -women, capably exploring deep waters, doing our work to defuse the mines that wait in the dark for someone to collide with them and set off their destructive power.

We are sent out to be farmers, tilling soil to plant seeds of hope, whether it be rich and fruitful or sandy and unyielding.

We are given sight to be oceanographers, joyfully acknowledging that for all of our knowledge, the depth of our field of study is unimaginable, and carries within it unfathomable mysteries that hundreds of human lifetimes will not apprehend.

We are astronauts, equipped to explore the vastness of the heavens, charged with adding to the knowledge and expanding the perspective of our earthbound species.

Somewhere in Jerusalem, a place was being prepared for a cross, and when it was planted there, the intersection of the vertical post and the

horizontal beam would become, for one moment and for all time, the central, defining intersection of the whole universe and all of history—

all the way down to the this very day, and right here in this room, and to all those who choose to follow Jesus—right down to you and me, and the decisions we make about how, and how far, we will follow where he leads.

For Jesus, it was the culmination of his earthly ministry.

For the disciples, the adventure was just beginning.

How would you like to carry on the mission?

What's next for you?

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