

22nd Sunday After Pentecost (Series B)

October 25, 2015

Gospel: Mark 10:46-52

Epistle: 1 Thess 4:13-18

Lesson: Amos 5:18-24

Psalm: Psalm 70

CLB Commentary: Dr. David Veum

Mark is concerned for his church, a church that is facing persecution. He uses the story of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26 to demonstrate both the need of the disciples and of his church. The question preceding the story introduces it: “Do you still not understand?” The story answers: “No, you don’t. You need your eyes opened to see more clearly. Yes, you have come to accept that I am the Messiah. (Peter’s subsequent confession will show this.) But you do not yet clearly see who I am and what following me really means. You need me to ‘put my hands on you’—hands that were now nail-pierced for those in the 3rd *Sitz im Leben*—so that you can see clearly who I am and keep following me.”

Then follow three passion predictions. Yes, Peter did confess that Jesus was the Christ, but only the Christ who had power over the wind and the sea and demons and disease. His understanding of the Son of Man “who had power on earth to forgive sins” was fuzzy at best, so fuzzy that he took Jesus aside and rebuked him. Jesus responded with the admonishment of the necessity to take up the cross and follow him.

To further clarify their understanding, Peter James and John see Christ in his transfigured glory. Still they are puzzled by the phrase, “rise from the dead.” To advance their understanding, the disciples discover their need to pray as the desperate father did. The power in their ministry did not reside in themselves but in Christ.

The second passion prediction is followed by an argument over who was the greatest. Instead, a desire to be first necessitated that they be last by serving. The third passion prediction is preceded by the story of the rich young ruler. He wanted to be first in wealth but also to be a follower. “That dog don’t hunt.” This was impossible. The third passion prediction was followed by a request from James and John for the places of highest prominence. They were so naïve as to think that they could “be baptized with the same baptism that Jesus was baptized with.” Instead, they needed to be the slaves of all and to follow Christ to the cross as the pericope before us now illustrates.

Jesus has completed his Galilean ministry. He is now on the way to the cross. This last pericope before the Triumphal entry summarizes and illustrates the call, the insight, and the cost of discipleship. A crowd is surrounding Jesus as they leave the city. Bartimaeus enters the story as one who is beside the way. In contrast, the disciples are those who are on the way following Jesus. Why was he beside the way? He was blind. The one who was the “son of Honor” lived a life of shame as a beggar.

But somewhere this man had learned of Jesus. The sound and excitement of the crowd passing made him ask what it was all about. On learning that it was about Jesus, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Until this point Mark has kept the Messianic secret. Jesus was known as only the Son of Man. Now on his way to Jerusalem where his cross would bear the inscription, “the King of the Jews,” the news is broadcast in the prayer of the blind man, “This is the Son of David!” Here was the promised Son who would make the name of David great, “like the names of the greatest men on earth” (2 Samuel 7:9 NIV). Here is the Suffering Servant who would bring the great light to those sitting in darkness.

The crowd shouts for him to be quiet. It makes the most sense that they were trying to keep the Messianic Secret a secret. But that is no longer necessary. Bartimaeus keeps shouting. Mark’s readers are invited to do the same. Jesus stops. He will stop for Mark’s readers too who now know that they need their eyes opened.

The crowd conveyed the wishes of Jesus using the word for “Be of good cheer,” which otherwise is confined to the lips of Jesus. Throwing aside his cloak, the one used to collect the alms, Bartimaeus jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. Jesus asks him the same question verbatim, except for the number of subject and verb, as he asked James and John in the previous pericope, “What do you want me to do for you?” The answer Bartimaeus gives is the one Mark wants his readers to give.

Jesus dismissed Bartimaeus with an affirmation of his faith and assurance of healing. But instead of going home, the healed man followed Jesus—the word for “followed” always means to follow as a disciple in the gospels—in discipleship as Jesus headed for the cross. The message to Mark’s congregation is clear. As the Messiah he has power to open their eyes and give them the gift of discipleship as they confess his name. Taking up the cross and following is no longer a burden. It is rather embracing Jesus as the Messiah who went to the cross.

The Fallen Condition Focus and Gospel Answer that I suggested to my preaching class are:

Our love of the good life closes our eyes to the cross.

The cross opens our eyes to real life.

We don't (yet) experience persecution like Mark's readers were experiencing, but we can be just as dissuaded by the good life as they may have been by a desire to escape a persecuted life.