

Following Jesus, a Journey from Darkness to Light 24 October 2021
Reading: Mark 10:46-52

Faithful God

Open the meaning of Scripture to us in a fresh and exciting way.

In Jesus name.

Amen

I have one of the best jobs. Every day I meet people with enormous faith and courage. This day was no exception. She was small, old, and frail. She only had sight in one eye and her final working eye had to be removed. “When you choose me a glass eye,” she said to her surgeon, “make sure it's one with a twinkle.” With faith, even the darkest time can be turned into light.

Today’s Gospel is one of darkness being turned into light. On the surface it's a simple healing. A blind man is cured and can see. But as we have come to expect with Jesus, much more is going on than meets the ‘eye’ (if you forgive the pun).

It’s a beautiful and layered story and it is full of irony. There are at least four healings taking place.

The crowd too are blind. They are blind to Bartimaeus. They, including the disciples, would be long practiced at ignoring the beggars. Jesus, by calling Bartimaeus over, forces the crowd to see Bartimaeus as a real person. Unlike so many poor, he has a name, which makes commentators think he went on to become an important member of the church.

Bartimaeus, although blind, can see who Jesus really is. He yells out a dangerous political name for Jesus, one that could have him arrested - “Son of David.” He speaks the name aloud and in using it he names Jesus as Messiah.

The healing we might miss is probably the most important of all for Bartimaeus. Jesus restores him to community. Bartimaeus “throws off his cloak” and follows Jesus “on the way.” A cloak is both a beggar’s covering and his livelihood. It’s a cloak he wraps around his shoulders every night for warmth and security. A cloak he spreads out on the ground every morning to collect coins from passersby. A cloak he folds again to gather up each day’s meager earnings at nightfall. He trusts Jesus so much that by the end of this story, he is able to cast aside what’s most familiar and safe in exchange for “a Way” that is new and full of uncertainty. In shedding his cloak, Bartimaeus sheds his identity. In setting out on “the Way” Bartimaeus becomes a disciple, a traveler, a pilgrim. He commits himself without looking back.

In our COVID season we have come to realise how important community is. As Janis Joplin once sang, “you don’t know what you got till it's gone”. The challenge we face in simply getting together with others has made us realise how important gathering together with others really is.

Darkness to light. This is one of the rare and beautiful moments in the Gospels when Jesus himself is truly *seen*. Bartimaeus sees Jesus as wholly and purely as Jesus sees Bartimaeus. The gaze and the recognition in this story are mutual.

Finally - and this is most precious of all - Jesus is so gentle with Bartimaeus that he asks him to articulate his heart's desire. "What do you want me to do for you?" In one sense, it's a bizarre question. Isn't it obvious what Bartimaeus wants Jesus to do for him? He's a blind beggar for goodness' sake! How hard can it be to figure out what he wants?



But Jesus doesn't presume. He doesn't reduce Bartimaeus to his blindness. Instead, he honors the fullness and complexity of a real human being who has many desires, many longings, and many needs. In asking the question Jesus invites Bartimaeus into the honest self-reflection that is essential to growth and healing. *What is in your heart? What do you long for? What would you ask of Jesus? What do you want of Jesus today? What is your heart's desire?*

Some of us are physically blind but we all struggle with darkness in our lives. No shame we all do ... Jesus wants to lead us, you and me, from darkness into new light.

We don't have to look into the pages of history to find courage and faith. In 2008 Johnny and Gertie Fox lost their son Fergal to suicide. In the despair following Fergal's death they were determined to make a difference in other people's lives. They created what they called Darkness to Light. That year, in the early hours of the morning, 479 people set out from their local park in memory of Fergal.

But more happened than a simple walk. Hope happened; community happened.

Since that day, The Power of Hope has transformed the *Darkness into Light* walk from a single group to a global movement of almost 200,000 people. The event now takes place in 202 venues all over the world with walks in 19 countries across 5 continents including New Zealand.

Every year, Johnny stands at the finish line at Phoenix Park cheering on every person who crosses it, from the very first runner to the final finisher. Without his tireless dedication and Gertie's support, the walk wouldn't be what it is today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OyBGcSQmH8>

Every time you set out to walk, or drive, or bike to church you are travelling from darkness to light. Every time we break the bread and gather in this place, we are saying that the light we have discovered in Jesus is more powerful than any kind of darkness.

A long time ago a blind man made a journey from darkness to light with the help of Jesus.

Today here and now Jesus invites you on that same journey.