

St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, November 11, 2018
Mark 10:46-52

They came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, a blind man, Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road begging. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many told him to be quiet, but he kept shouting all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

They called the blind man, saying, "Cheer up! Get up. He is calling you!"

He tossed aside his outer garment, jumped up, and went to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man replied, "Rabboni, I want to see again." Jesus told him, "Go. Your faith has made you well." Immediately he received his sight and began following Jesus on the road.

Life often delivers horrible news which leaves us speechless. A young man decides to storm into his old school in Parkland, Florida and kill a bunch of his classmates. A man decides to shoot up a bar in California. Hurricanes dump feet of rain and rip buildings apart in the Carolinas and Florida. Terrible events which leave us speechless, but are often accompanied by one simple question: why? Why did these things happen which seem to produce nothing but pointless sorrow and suffering happen?

Our gospel lesson introduces us to a person who seemed to be suffering for no apparent reason. **“They came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, a blind man, Bartimaeus the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road begging.”** Our lesson introduces us to a blind man named Bartimaeus who was forced to beg because he was blind and this blindness brought seemingly pointless suffering into his life.

The thing which made it worse for Bartimaeus was that he used to be able to see. We know he used to be able to see because he says to Jesus, **“Rabboni, I want to see again.”** How his blindness must have eaten at Bartimaeus. It didn’t used to be this way. He used to be able to see, but now he couldn’t. Was it because someone did something to him? Was it his own fault because he did something to himself? We don’t know, but odds are Bartimaeus would have the same question we would. Why?

If Bartimaeus wondered why he became blind, he wouldn’t be alone. People often want answers when something bad happens. They demand to know the reason and will do their best to prevent the horrible event from ever happening again. We’ve been reminded about this because of the recent midterm elections where political ads feature politicians who are convinced if they had the right laws events like Parkland or Thousand Oaks would never happen again.

Or maybe it is when a major hurricane strikes. Did it strike because our planet is warming at an unsustainable rate? Or perhaps (as I remember people saying after hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans) it is a sign of judgment because it hit a city filled with wicked and terrible behavior. Bad and terrible things which happen in our world leave people confused and hurting. They make people question and wonder. They leave people searching for answers.

How do Christians respond when these bad things happen? It can be incredibly easy for us to say, “These things happen because of sin in our world. People won’t be able to stop them and they will keep on happening until Jesus comes back.” You wouldn’t be wrong if you said this or believed this when bad things happen, but do those words sound like the attitude of someone who cares? Or is it the attitude of someone who is indifferent to the suffering of others?

What about when tragedy strikes closer to home? When you’re sitting in the doctor’s office and you’re told you have cancer? Or your boss calls you into their office and you hear the words, “You’re fired”? What if you suffer a stroke and you’re convinced God will help you get better because you’re faithfully doing your rehab and doing everything right, but you don’t get better? How content are you to let God do his thing without questioning his motives or reasons for allowing bad things to happen to you?

It is easy to allow the words, “God is in control and who are we to question him” to roll off the tongue when bad stuff isn’t happening to you. However, it is a completely different story when you are

personally involved and experiencing trouble in your lives. The questions pop up in your mind, “Doesn’t God love me? Why didn’t he stop me from getting cancer? Why did he allow me to lose my job? How come he isn’t blessing me and allowing me to get better?”

We often want to know the reason God allows hurtful stuff which seems to have no point into our lives. It is part of who we are as people. Yet, our gospel lesson shows us the proper attitude for a Christian isn’t to question God about why he allows something to happen in our lives. No, our gospel lesson shows us God is able to use these horrible things which happen in our lives and to work them out for our good.

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“He tossed aside his outer garment, jumped up, and went to Jesus. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him. The blind man replied, ‘Rabboni, I want to see again.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go. Your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he received his sight and began following Jesus on the road.”

Bartimaeus has been suffering from blindness, but one day he hears Jesus is coming through Jericho. He has heard of Jesus and is excited by the possibility of meeting him.

However, did you notice what his cry was? Was it, “Jesus, please make me better?” Was it, “Jesus, why didn’t you stop this from happening to me?” No, it was, **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

Bartimaeus appealed to Jesus’ mercy. He asked Jesus to look at his condition, which Bartimaeus could do nothing to change on his own, and do something about it. He trusted Jesus could do something for him and he made his appeal to Jesus for mercy.

What can we learn from Bartimaeus? Is the reason you got cancer is because you weren’t leaning on Jesus’ mercy? Or you were fired because you didn’t trust Jesus enough? Or he will make you better if your prayer is, “Jesus, have mercy on me!”? No, those aren’t the lessons which Jesus wants us to learn from Bartimaeus. What does he learn from Bartimaeus? He wants us to learn to echo Bartimaeus’ cry when he says, **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

This cry recognizes a desperate state which we are in. Our state in life is helpless. We are powerless to stop cancer which can cause death. We can’t prevent others from inflicting harm on us which results in losing our jobs. Our best efforts to recover from stroke or some other physical ailment are frustrated. Our helpless state and inability to prevent things from happening reflects the fact we live in a sinful world and we can’t do anything to cure the evil which sin brings into our world.

However, what reality does the cry, **“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”** reflect? It says, “Jesus, I know I’m powerless to do anything about sin. I can’t get rid of it. I can’t flee from it. I need you and your mercy to do something about it because I can’t. Please, Jesus, have mercy on me!” Our appeal to Jesus

can never be based on us and how great we are. No, our appeal to Jesus must always be on him and his love for us.

How should we define Jesus' mercy? Jesus' mercy looks at us in the helpless state we are in and he acts. He doesn't merely treat the symptoms (i.e. curing cancer, prevent our firing or dramatically healing us) he attacks sin which is the root cause of our suffering. Sin is a curse which afflicts our world and the only way for this curse to be gotten rid of was by Jesus becoming a curse for us. Jesus lived, died and rose to do away with the curse of sin forever.

Jesus' mercy has done away with sin's curse, but you might wonder, "Why does bad stuff still happen?" Yes, Jesus has removed sin's curse, but he hasn't removed us from the sinful world. However, the fact we live in a sinful world doesn't mean Jesus can't control evil. What do I mean? Our second lesson illustrates my point. **"Men of Israel, hear these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man recommended to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you."**

"This man, who was handed over by God's set plan and foreknowledge, you killed by having lawless men nail him to a cross. He is the one God raised up by freeing him from the agony of death, because death was not able to hold him in its grip. Indeed, David says concerning him: I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced."

The apostle Peter is preaching on Pentecost and he details the way Jesus turned the ultimate evil to our good. Peter points out the fact Jesus was murdered by the Jewish leaders, but what did God do? He used Jesus' murder for our good. Yes, Jesus was killed, but he defeated death by rising from the dead. What does Jesus' resurrection mean for us? **"Indeed, David says concerning him: I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."**

Jesus' resurrection means you can have comfort in any situation because he is in control in every situation. He is right there with you and in control when your life is spinning out of control because you are diagnosed with cancer or when you aren't getting any better after a stroke. He is still watching over you when you lose your job. He can look way into the future (where you can't see) and see an eternity of love and peace and joy made possible by his mercy for you.

Yet, what good does his resurrection do you when you're suffering? When your life screams out trouble and turmoil and heartache rather than peace and joy? Well, when is the cry, **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"** most often on your lips? Is it when things are going really good in your life? Or is it when things are hard and difficult? Or should I ask when does it mean more? It means a whole lot more (and happens a whole lot more often) when you're going through trial doesn't it?

Now, you understand the reason why Jesus allows these bad things to happen to you. They are tools which he uses to draw you closer to himself. The tools he uses will often hurt, but take heart. Your suffering isn't pointless. Jesus is using them to bring the cry, **"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"** to your lips to give you a greater appreciation for the fact he has had mercy on you and his mercy is your entrance into heaven where he will remove your suffering forever. Amen.