

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

October 25, 2009
30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Reformation Sunday

Job 42:1-6, 10-17

¹Then Job answered the LORD: ²"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ⁴Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' ⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

¹⁰And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. ¹²The LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. ¹³He also had seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. ¹⁵In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. ¹⁶After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. ¹⁷And Job died, old and full of days.

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶They came to Jericho. As he 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.

"Away With the Coat!"

Just the other day I saw it—it was an advertisement for a movie that a friend of mine had spoken about. It is coming out soon. It will be released, I believe, in November. While the title and the story line are not so significant, what stands out about the movie is it will be in 3-D.

I'm not sure how 3-D movies work these days. I recall 3-D movies of years gone by—from more than a few decades ago when those cardboard glasses would be distributed with one eye of red and another of blue.

Such, I have to confess, is my limited experience with 3-D. This 3-D movie that is to be released within weeks holds little interest for me other than being a reminder of the fact that I cannot see 3-D. In order to see 3-D one has to have two eyes that work in stereo. I do not. I have one eye that sees the majority of what I see. The other eye sees very little. I have 20/999 vision in my left eye.

I don't speak of that reality all that often because it has little real effect on my life. Other than having no depth perception and not being able to watch 3-D movies, I live my life fairly normal. To meet me, most people do not even realize that I have one functional eye.

As a small child, things were fairly more obvious. The one eye was turned way down and did not track with the other eye. Thanks to the expertise of a young Doctor Tschetter, who by now is surely retired, my eyes look for the most part normal. He performed two surgeries on me, one when I was 5 and the other when I was 6 years old.

In thinking back, I remember the scary stuff about those experiences, but I have other memories too. I remember how I had come home from the hospital. I was in the living room on the couch. It was what happened when one of us kids was "sick." We camped on the couch and nested in with blankets, pillows, and though I cannot remember—I'm sure there were other essentials there in the sick bed with us.

I remember that my eyes were both covered with bandages and I could see nothing. I also remember that there were people in the kitchen. Most likely it was my Mom and my brothers. I remember too the vivid smell of bread becoming toast. I wanted to be out there with them. I could see nothing. I was blind.

I could have called out to Mom and she would have come. I could have asked for someone to help me and they would have been there. But, I did neither of those things. And though 39 years have come and gone since then, I can recall that I threw aside my blankets and the comfort of the couch and stood up and worked my way to the kitchen where everyone else was.

It may not sound like much to you now, but totally blind and in a sheer act of confidence and faith that I could get to the kitchen on my own, I threw off those covers. I threw aside that security blanket and stood and walked and made my way through the darkness.

These stories of blindness in the scriptures always capture my attention. Perhaps it is because of the struggle I had for literal sight as a young person. Perhaps it is, nonetheless these stories of the blind being healed are close to my heart.

I have read these stories many times. I have read the two here in Mark's gospel and the ones that appear in the other gospels. This time, as I read the story of Blind Bartimaeus, the beggar, I saw something I have never seen.

I saw it—that same moment. It was that same moment of 39 years ago that is real in my mind today. I can hear them talking out there in the kitchen. I can smell the toast. I can recall that I wanted to be out there and not under the cover of that security blanket.

That toast cooking in the kitchen familiar voices of love and welcome moment is here in this text. I think, that although I have been looking at these stories for a long time—I did not see that moment in the life of Bartimaeus until I read the story this time.

Bartimaeus is blind. And Jesus is passing by him on the way. It should be clear to us readers of the story where Jesus is going. He has told us three times that he is headed towards Jerusalem where he will be condemned, killed and after three days rise again.

This is part of the journey. James and John and the other disciples are traveling with him. There is clearly a whole entourage of those who travel along. As they come along here, Barimaeus starts to call out. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” And they try to shosh him—“Be quiet in church.” He just shouts it all the louder, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” “Be quiet.” “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

“Be quiet.” Then Jesus says, “Call him here.” And notice that word “call” because it is significant. This is a story about call. The crowd then changes its tune from “Be quiet,” to “Hurry up the teacher is calling you.” At the word that Jesus is calling we are told clearly that Bartimaeus, “throwing off his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus.”

That was his moment of smelling the toast from the kitchen. That was the moment when he knew where he wanted to be and he threw off the security blanket to get up still in his blindness and move in faith.

He had faith to believe that not only was Jesus worth his while in getting to, but he had faith to know that where he was was not where he was to be. There was more for him in life and this Jesus was it.

It took faith to shed that cloak. See that cloak was, as a poor beggar, his most valuable possession. Without it he was subject to the cold of the night. It was the very thing that kept him warm and protected him from the harshness of the elements.

But that was not only all it was. It was also the means to his support. He sat there day in and day out begging for help. His only access to worldly goods of food and need were the coins that those who passed him by tossed his way. His cloak would have been spread out before him and it was on that cloak that those coins would have been thrown.

The coins that landed on his cloak were his. Without it he had nothing.

But, oh the text is clear. Throwing off the cloak, he springs up and comes to Jesus. He does not need the security blanket. He will not need it. He does not have to be concerned with hanging onto it—it is part of his old world order that is going to be fully gone. He just does not need it.

And he knows that—he see that, if you will, while he is still blind.

And that throwing off of the cloak is the clear moment of faith. It is when he becomes a disciple of this one called Jesus. It is very moment he steps up and moves towards the warm kitchen smell of the kingdom of God.

That is the point in which the miracle of the story happens. After that, it is then that the easily seen miracle happens. His sight is restored. Notice there is no touch involved. There is no spittle or mud as in other stories of blindness being restored. Here it is proclamation. Jesus proclaims him healed and his sight is restored.

Then, oh then, he follows Jesus on the way. It is not like the other healings where the healed one is sent on and told to be silent. This Bartimaeus joins Jesus on the progression that leads to the cross.

So often we read these stories of healing as miracles stories. Jesus words are clear, “Your faith has made you well.” This is about faith—that moment we shed our coat—that moment we say “away with the coat” and spring up still with our blindness confident of our being called by Christ to come forward.

Oh that is the Job story. The way the text reads today at the conclusion of the book makes it as if everything is okay. All is made well. Job’s fortunes are restored and he now has these beautiful daughters. We are told that he lives long. It makes it sound as if the story that began with “Once upon a time,” has now ended with “They lived happily ever after.”

It is just too tidy. It is just too clean. It is just to not true to how life really is lived. There is no rewards and punishments God. There is instead a God of incredible grace. The power of the story is that Job when all was taken away, when God was silent, when he called God out – oh, even there Job did somehow and someway have this deep and abiding faith.

And he had that faith while he was still suffering. He had that faith while he was still bravely and boldly asking the questions. He had that faith while there were the unresolved issues. He had that faith while he was still blind. He had that faith as he pushed away the security blanket and headed for the toast aroma in the kitchen.

The miracle is when our faith moves at the point where we are still blind.

It is a dark world we live in. It is a world that we cannot see clearly. There are the unanswered questions and the unanswerable questions.

All is in shift.

It is the essence of the Reformation. That the church too must be able to shift and move and be confronted by the Word of God and this God of incredible grace. This is not a God of rewards and punishments—it is a God of love.

It is the kind of God that is so close, so real, so palpably present that you can taste that God and see that God even in broken bread and poured out cup. This God invited us to see that our coats spread out before us and our security blankets really are nothing.

They are only temporary. We have all these earthly things we rely on and count on to give us ground and security. They won't make it. The money. The house. The position. The status. The beauty. The youth. The 401K. The cash. The crown. The contents of the safe.

Away with that coat. Even now, while we are still blind—it is miracle time. Cast it off. Spring up. Go. Follow.

It is not your security blanket that counts. Away with the coat! It is you! You are the disciple! The aroma is calling you. Our springing up, ...our following on the way, ...that is the miracle. That is God in us! Amen.