

ALL SAINTS WESTON

10 MARCH 2024

SANCTUARY AND ENGAGE

MOTHERING SUNDAY

“WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?”

“What do you want me to do for you?” is our question.

Well let’s get the one joke out of the way first shall we?

There was once a man who, when he had reached the age of sixty rather unfortunately longed that his wife, also sixty, somehow could be made thirty years younger than him. And so when he was visited by the Good Fairy who offered to grant him one wish, he knew what to ask. And so he closed his eyes and asked that his wife might become thirty years younger than him. Poooff. There was a flash and he opened his eyes. He looked at his wife but she still looked 60 like him. “oh dear” “it hasn’t worked”.

“Oh yes it has said” the Good Fairy “Look in the mirror” and he did and saw that he now had the face of a ninety year old man.

WHAT DO YOU WANT

“What do you want me to do for you?” It’s a powerful question like all the questions we have focused on this year with more to come.

I’m not going to ask you to write down your answers to this question this morning but if I were to do that, I don’t suppose there would be any shortage of responses and I am sure everyone here would have at least one thing they would love God to do for them:

- It might be for a miracle of healing or provision
- It might be for clear guidance or direction
- It might be for peace of mind, for contentment, for an end to anxiety
- It might be for a strong, undeniable sense of God’s presence in your life
- It might be for the healing of a relationship
- Your deepest want may not even be for yourself but for someone close to you – in your family – a child or a grandchild

On this Mothering Sunday we might think particularly of those:

- Who have longed with all their heart to be a mother (or a father) and it hasn’t happened
- Those who have had or have great grief and heartache over their children

Almost certainly, at least one thing I have listed has resonated with you. I think I could put something down for nearly everyone of those – and more.

To be human is to be full of wants and needs. To have what the psalmist calls the ‘desires of the heart’. A It is a universal

experience to see our situation however good it may seem but much more so if it is a bad situation – to see it changed for the better. And if you are a Christian and if you know your psalms, many of you will have gone to God quoting him those lines from Psalm 37

*“Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

*⁵Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him and he will do this:*

⁶He will make your reward shine like the dawn”

“Lord give me the desires of my heart”. But as often as not the thing your heart so desired has not come to pass or has not yet come to pass. Often the opposite may have happened. The child died. The relationship ended. The business was a failure. You have never truly felt the deep assurance of God’s love for you and his forgiveness.

Well I do not pretend to be able to answer all your questions and doubts and maybe even your resentments over these things but I do think this incident that we have heard read to us can shed some light on that question *“what do you want me to do for you”*

You know the story well but even so let’s go quickly through it, picking out some of the details.

This incident, this miracle occurs towards the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry. He is leaving Jericho, having had a good meal at the house of Zacchaeus. Jericho is the lowest city on earth and he and his followers are making the steady 15 mile, 3,000

feet climb to Jerusalem. A big crowd is accompanying them out of town and many are lining the road out to cheer, to watch to ask for help. Jesus is probably surrounded and talking all the time. Maybe Zacchaeus, whose life has just been turned upside down, is probably part of the escort party.

And there sitting on the roadside is Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, perhaps with another blind beggar (in Matthews’s account there are two men) and as Jesus draws near, he or they shout for all they are worth. The Greek word can mean to scream. The word was used by the crowd when they shouted “crucify him”. And when Jesus on the cross shouted “Finished” before he took his last breath, that was the same word again.

The noise is unsettling. It is unseemly. It is irritating. Bartimaeus is told to be quiet by those around him. They are rebuked, told off, told to “shut up”. But that does not deter Bartimaeus. Why, he shouts all the louder! And Jesus stops for him. Above the hubbub, Jesus calls for the man to come or be brought.

All this time Bartimaeus has been sitting, but Mark writes: *‘throwing his cloak aside, he jumped up and came to Jesus’*. There’s a complete three point sermon in that short phrase: *“throwing his cloak aside, he jumped up and he came to Jesus”*.

When he gets to Jesus, he is asked the question *“what do you want me to do for you?”*. Well at one level it is obvious but Jesus wants to hear the man say for himself what he wants and needs. Jesus does not take away his agency. The man has

to say: *“I am blind but I want to see. I don’t want to be like this anymore”*.

Matthew adds a detail that Mark and Luke don’t include. Matthew writes: *“Jesus had compassion on them/him and touched their eyes.”* Jesus is moved. Jesus’ heart goes out to him. Maybe Jesus sees in that moment the years of sadness, bitterness, unfulfilled hopes, rejections and poverty. He stretches out his hand and touches the beggar’s sightless eyes. The heart is moved and the hand reaches out. That would make a good two point sermon.

This short little story ends like this: *Go,’ said Jesus, ‘your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.*

I now want to draw out some general principles from the story of Bartimaeus to help us think about how we respond to the question that Jesus asked Bartimaeus. It won’t answer all your questions – or my questions – but the principles hold true.

What can we learn from Bartimaeus’ situation and his actions? And what can we learn about Jesus?

FIRSTLY BARTIMAEUS

1. His REALITY was DESPERATE

Firstly notice that **his Reality was Desperate**. Bartimaeus did not have a lot going for him. There was no social security system to support him. There was no medical treatment available to him. There was no pension built up from his earnings to take care of him in old age. His reality, as it is for many people today, was desperate. He was a man with little or nothing that he could call upon except the bits and pieces people gave to a beggar. I suspect that one of the reasons why we see fewer answers to prayer is that our wants are not borne out of great distress or desperation. Now there are good reasons for that. Many of the trials we face are made more bearable because of the times we live in and the situation we are in. We live in the most supported and protected society ever. If you are part of a church, and this church in particular I hope that you do feel supported. But there are situations which seem pretty hopeless and this is maybe where we have to feel our situation is truly hopeless and throw ourselves more onto the Lord. Bartimaeus knew, with good reason, that his situation could not be resolved by human means.

2. HIS RESPONSE was DETERMINED

Secondly his **Response was Determined**. Given his desperate reality, when the possibility of reversing that situation comes along he is determined to do something about it. When an opportunity comes he seizes it.

Whether or not he was in his usual place that day or whether he had made sure that he was there that day, we do not know. The fact is he was there. It doesn't matter in which chair you sit when you come to church or at home when you pray, but it does matter that you are in a place where you can encounter Jesus.

And when Jesus is on the scene, he shouts for all he is worth and he won't be put off by those shushing him around him. He is going to make sure that Jesus hears him. He is persistent. He is in deadly earnest. He is determined. He was like the widow, in the story Jesus told about prayer. You remember she kept on going back and back to the judge to get him to hear her case and give her justice. In the end the judge gave in.

Is your request, your prayer like that? Persistent? Persevering? Truly earnest? Determined?

And then when the call comes from Jesus, Bartimaeus loses no time. He doesn't hum and haw. Why would he? And just in case he might trip or stumble over his cloak, he throws it off. *"Let us throw aside every weight that holds us back"* says the book of Hebrews and *"run the race"* or in this case run to Jesus. His response is determined. His prayer will be heard. What are the things that might hold you back, tie you down, trip you up? Stop you getting close to Jesus?

3. HIS REQUEST WAS DEFINITE

Thirdly his **Request was Definite**. So when Jesus speaks to him and asks his question, His request is definite. It is not just a case of bless me Lord. But "Lord I want to see Restore my

sight". Sometimes it is true we do not know what to pray as Paul says in Romans, but when we can, it is good to be really specific and definite. When Hudson Taylor prayer for more missionaries, he did not just pray for more missionaries but a specific number.

God wants us to step out in faith and be specific and be definite. Of course there is a risk in that but there is also the potential to see

4. The RESULT was DRAMATIC

So...

- His reality was desperate...
- His response was determined ...
- His request was definite
- And the **result was dramatic**

[That was hard getting four R's and four D's]

The dramatic result is twofold. Firstly there is the physical receiving of sight and secondly there is the change of life that is going to follow afterwards. In the crowd was a changed man Zaccaheus and no here is another changed man – physically and spiritually.

How amazing that the first person he saw on gaining his sight was the Lord Jesus. It is no surprise that he was now going to

follow him. For how long he followed him, we do not know. Hopefully all his life. But now his desperate cries have turned to shouts of praise and the people joined in with him. Once he would not be silenced with his prayers, now he will not be silenced with his praise. It was a day of all days for him. No other day had been like that before – unless it was when he lost his sight if he had not been born blind. It was unlikely that there would be another day quite as dramatic and life-changing like that for him in his life. But now he was set on a new pathway and the real business of following Jesus had begun. I hope there have been times in your life when God has come into your life in a special way like this – maybe the first time you really truly put your trust in Jesus. Maybe in other ways.

SECOND: JESUS

Now let us leave Bartimaeus for the time being and very briefly focus on Jesus and what this story tells us about him.

Firstly it tells us that he hears our cries. With all that is going on around him, the entourage surrounding him, the crowds shouting out, he hears the cry of this man. There are many staggering things to understand about the universe and about the God who made it but one of the most staggering and hard things to get your head around is that God knows each of us ... that God knows our name and that God hears us. He hears billions. I find that hard to comprehend but I have found it a little easier to comprehend when I think of the internet. I can type a word into google and in an instant I will get back hundreds of references to that word from documents all over the world. Or someone can put out a tweet or a video or a picture and it can be seen by millions within a few hours.

The Lord knows us and hears each one of us. He can pick out every voice and every situation. He knows the desires of our hearts. While we were in our mother's womb he knew us as Psalm 139 tells us.

Secondly we know he has a compassionate heart. It is not just a case of hearing and moving on but his heart goes out to this man. "moved with compassion" is a phrase often used to describe Jesus. His heart went out to the man and then his call went out and then his hand went out and touched him.

Chapter three of Hebrews says:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Or as the Message puts it

We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all— all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

Thirdly Jesus Christ has the power to transform the situation. Often our heart goes out to people and there is not much or nothing we can do (although very often there is something we can do) but we know that loves and situations have been transformed through the power of God.

So our trust and faith this morning is in a God

- Who hears us when we call to him
- Whose heart for us is filled with love and compassion
- Whose power to save and transform is limitless

“What do you want me to do for you?” he says to us.

As always in preparing a sermon, I am aware of much more that could be said ... that some of the difficult questions about prayer have not been addressed and most significantly how my own words are a challenge to me and my response to situations and needs in my life and that of others. But I think I can confidently say this if we are serious about the question, if our response to the Lord is determined, persistent, if we willing to throw off that which hinders, willing to be specific and definite in our requests, then we would see more of God at work in our lives. More change and transformation in us. More change and transformation in others. More change and transformation in the world.

Would we find that every request, every heart’s desire was answered? No

Would we find that more requests were answered? Yes.