

Introductory

This text has parallels in Matthew (20: 29-34) and Luke (18: 35-43). This Mark text is the longest of them. None of those texts is appointed to be read on any Sunday in the TLH one-year lectionary. This text is appointed to be read on Pentecost 23 in the B Series in LW. I have no record of ever having preached on this text, but because of the way things shake out this church year, I will.

In *Under the Influence* (182-183), Al Schmidt talks about blindness in the Ancient World,

As we have already noted, human life in the Greco-Roman world was extremely cheap; people were expendable. This was especially true for infants born with physical defects such as blindness. Blind infants were commonly abandoned in the wilderness or taken to die in a mountain gorge. In Lacedemonian (Greece), for instance, blind babies were cast into the sea. Boys who survived their blind infancy or who became blind later in childhood usually became galley slaves, and blind girls were commonly destined to a life of prostitution.

You might also want to talk about some of the Christian efforts over the years to assist the blind. Schmidt talks about Louis Braille, a Frenchman who invented that thing named after him, and others who made life better for blind people. I have talked about the Christian roots of Gallaudet School for the Blind in D.C. and the difference in those things between Christian and not places.

By this time, we Christians have two millennia of history to stand on, and our religion has been a good thing for the world. I talk about that often – much more than I talk about the OT – because we are connected to that, and because the World spends a lot of time telling people how terrible a place the Christian world is, particularly the Middle Ages and the height of Christendom.

I deliberately teach those things in preaching, because people are confronted every day with the lies that are spread about us and our religion. I teach them to my children, especially during Confirmation Class, and I tell them why and warn them about all the lies they are going to be told at university. And I talk about Evolution as being very bad science because it's horrible science.

How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization – Thomas Woods

Anything by Rodney Stark.

Civilization; the West and the Rest by Niall Ferguson

Even some Thomas Holland, but it's a hard read.

Textual Notes

46. They were at Jericho, now they're leaving that city, and He was accompanied by “τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄχλου ἱκανοῦ - His disciples and a large crowd.” We are not told what Jesus did while inside Jericho, but Luke tells us that on the way in, He healed a blind man. Was the crowd hoping to see more of the same, or were they only the normal crowd that followed Him around?

Barclay reminds us that Jesus is heading for Jerusalem, 22 K (15 miles) down the road, and says,

when a distinguished Rabbi or teacher was on such a journey it was the custom that he was surrounded by a crowd of people, disciples and learners, who listened to him as he discoursed while he walked. That was one of the commonest ways of teaching...those who were unable to go (to Passover) were in the habit of lining the streets of towns and villages through which groups of Passover pilgrims must pass to bid them god speed on their way. So then the streets of Jericho would be lined with people, and there would be even more than usual, for there would be many eager and curious to catch a glimpse of this audacious Galilaean who had pitted himself against the assembled might of orthodoxy.

Matthew tells us that there were two blind men involved in this encounter. Jesus' healing of the blind man on His way into town is (obviously) a different incident from the one on His way out of town. Mark focuses in on one of the two blind men, ὁ υἱὸς Τιμαίου Βαρτιμαῖος, τυφλὸς προσαίτης, ἐκάθητο παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν – Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, a beggar, sitting beside the road.”

The Hebrew word “Bar” means “Son,” and to say that Bar Timaeus is the Son of Timaeus seems to be redundant. Lange's take on this is common among commentators, and makes the best sense,

This account of him hints that he was a personage well known to Christians in St Mark's time as a monument of the Lord's miracle, as was probably also Simon the Leper; and the designation ‘son of Timæus’ would distinguish him, not merely from the father but also from other sons.

To say that the blind man was a beggar would seem to be equally redundant. What else was a blind man to do to make a living? Certainly, there were blind people who could contribute to society, like there are today. But I suppose somebody – Timaeus – would have to care, and in the NT we run into blind people all the time whose only contribution to society seems to be begging.

It Timaeus is noteworthy because he later became a Christian – perhaps a noteworthy one at that – maybe (obviously) this is the thing for which he is noted. Paul talks about how he used to murder

Christians in his former life, and God changed him. If Timaeus later became a Christian, Mark is talking about how he used to not even take care of his own blind son and look at him now!

47. But the man's ears worked just fine, and you have heard that the sense of hearing in the blind is particularly acute, the one sense making up for the missing sense, “καὶ ἀκούσας ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζαρηνός ἐστιν – and hearing that it's Jesus of Nazareth,” one time I went to baseball card show in Madison, WI. Out in the parking lot, a man was shouting “it's Gale, here comes Gale.”

It was the Kansas Comet, Gale Sayers, and he was drawing a crowd. So did Greg Jennings at the airport in HNL the day after the Pro Bowl, navigating the double stroller through a crowd of autograph seekers. We rode to Chicago on the same plane, but I was in steerage, and I think he and his brood were up front. We find that happening to Jesus a lot; crowds following Him around.

So, the blind man heard and perceived that Jesus was in the house, “ἤρξατο κράζειν καὶ λέγειν Υἱὲ Δαυεὶδ Ἰησοῦ, ἐλέησόν με – and he began to cry out, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’” He calls Jesus by His given name, and attributes to him the messianic title “Son of David.” Any doubt that Bartimaeus is a Christian will be dispelled when Jesus talks about his faith (52).

His request is only for Jesus to show mercy to him. Later on (51), Jesus will ask him specifically what he wants Him to do, and he tells Him. That exchange confirms what is implicit in the cry for mercy; clearly the cry for mercy is a request to have his sight restored. In terms of the hierarchy of needs, the senses – particularly sight and hearing – are high up on the list of priorities.

In fact, on multiple occasions we find Jesus healing people with those disabilities, but He never restores somebody's sense of smell, or taste, or touch. People who have had The Rona and still can't taste things and they don't like that, but given your druthers, most people would probably choose that over not being able to see or hear. And touch can go both ways, can't it.

48. After two thousand years of the influence of Christianity, we are definitely more sensitive to people with disabilities than they were. Can you imagine a blind man today requesting help, “καὶ ἐπετίμων αὐτῷ πολλοὶ ἵνα σιωπήσῃ – and many were rebuking him, that he should be silent.” Barnes says that they did the rebuking “in a threatening manner.” Why would they do that?

It's possible that they were put off by the blind man addressing Jesus by that messianic title. Perhaps they were thinking that there's only so much Jesus to go around, and the more time He spends with him, the less time He spends with us. Most likely the crowds rebuked Jesus for the same reason why some disciples rebuked the people who brought children to Jesus to bless them.

Children and disabled people were not the kinds of people upon whom a high value was placed in the ancient world. We see that all the time in the Bible, including the NT. What we see here and in other places is Jesus changing that perception. He is our leader, and two thousand years after He began the movement to make all lives valuable, we've come a long way from the ancient world.

But Bartimaeus was having nothing to do with those rebukes, “ὁ δὲ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἔκραζεν Υἱὲ Δαυεὶδ, ἐλέησόν με – but much more he kept crying out, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me.’” He had a terribly debilitating condition, and this was his shot – probably his only shot – at getting a life-changing procedure to get his sight, and he wasn’t going to stop calling out to Jesus until...

49. Apparently, Jesus heard the man’s cries, “καὶ στὰς ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν Φωνήσατε αὐτόν – and stopping, Jesus said, him to be called.” The meaning is that Jesus commanded (requested) the man who was yelling at Him to be brought to Him, “καὶ φωνοῦσιν τὸν τυφλὸν λέγοντες αὐτῷ Θάρσει, ἔγειρε, φωνεῖ σε – and they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘take heart, He is calling to you.’”

The man is yelling, the crowds are shushing him, Jesus hears the yelling and does not go to the man, but has the man led to Him. Who are the “they” who assist the man? If it were the disciples or Apostles, Mark probably would have said that. That the generic “they” bring the man to Jesus at the command (request) of Jesus speaks to the gravitas He possessed, and they gave to Him.

The word “θαρσέω” is variously translated “have courage” or “cheer up” and the KJV has “be of good comfort.” The word is used a total of seven times in the NT, sometimes to calm a person who is afraid of something, and more often when Jesus is about to do a miraculous healing, like He’s about to do here. They also told him to rise, which means that he had been sitting.

50. The man responds, “ὁ δὲ ἀποβαλὼν τὸ ἱμάτιον αὐτοῦ ἀναπηδήσας ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν – casting off his outer garment, he jumped up and came to Jesus.” Some of the translation have the man “springing up,” and I’ll bet he did just that. Some of the commentators seem to think that the man was led by others to Jesus, but that’s not what it says. But how did he know where to go?

Others opine that the man went to the sound of the voice of Jesus, and that makes sense. If Jesus is doing the ambulatory pedagogy of which Barclay speaks, it says that He stopped, but it does not say that He stopped talking, i.e., teaching. To think otherwise is to think that Jesus stopped talking and waited for the man to come to Him. It’s also to think that Jesus is incapable of multi-tasking.

51. When he got there, “καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν Τί σοι θέλεις ποιήσω – answering him, Jesus says, ‘what do you want me to do?’” The answer is to the man’s request, and don’t we suppose Jesus could see that the man was blind. Did He just want him to say it? God does things for us all the time, often unrequested, like any parent, and of course Jesus here wants to be asked.

Bart is happy to put his need into a sentence, “δὲ τυφλὸς εἶπεν αὐτῷ Ῥαββουνεὶ, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω – the blind man said, ‘Rabboni, that I should receive sight.’” Even though he actively initiated this encounter, and actively got up and walked over to Jesus, the man uses a passive verb to talk about receiving his sight, knowing that he is merely the passive recipient of the healing power of Jesus.

52. In fact, it’s already done, “καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ Ὑπαγε, ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε – and Jesus said to Him, ‘go, your faith has healed you.’” Faith is not always required for Jesus to heal

you, but here it says the faith of Bartimaeus that healed him, who is the passive recipient of the healing power of Jesus. He is also the passive recipient of the faith given to him by God.

As is always the case with Jesus, when He wants to do a miracle, He does that miracle, first time, every time, “καὶ εὐθὺς ἀνέβλεψεν, καὶ ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ - and immediately, he received sight, and began to follow Him on the road.” Yet another use of the passive verb “to receive,” and then the man very actively – he can see the road now, and he follows Jesus down that road.

That word “τῇ ὁδῷ – the road,” is used in the NT – especially in John – to refer to what we might call the Christian Walk. It has its roots in the OT concept of the Word of God as a “lamp unto my path, and a light unto my path,” and the like. In Acts (9:2), Saul is persecuting “the way,” and later on (24:14), we see that the term had become a common one to refer to the fledgling Church.

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