

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (27 October 2024)

They 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. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then 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." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way. (Mark 10:46-52 – NRSV)

Introductory notes

General

Matthew 20:29-34 and Luke 18:35-43 report a similar event. Both Matthew and Luke omit the name of the beggar. They also omit the detail of the beggar throwing off his garment. Mark's account "of the healing of blind Bartimaeus is unique among the healings of the Synoptics for its warmth and interest in the person healed. Bartimaeus is, in fact, the only person healed in the Synoptic Gospels whose name is given" (J R Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, W B Eerdmans, 2002, 382).

The journey towards Jerusalem continues. They come to Jericho: "Located fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem, five miles west of the Jordan River, and six miles north of the Dead Sea, Jericho is a kind of oasis in the midst of some rough terrain. The city had something of a revival under Herod the Great, who built a winter palace in the area" (J R Donahue, & D J Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002, 317). Jericho is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on the earth. It is also about 250 metres below sea level!

After a brief introduction to his Gospel – 1:1-6 – Mark describes Jesus' ministry in Galilee – 1:14-7:23. Then, as Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem, Mark tells us of his ministry beyond Galilee – 7:24 – 10:52. In the description of the latter, we have two healings of blind men – one near the beginning in 8:22-26 and one at the end, before the Jerusalem ministry begins, in 10:46-52.

In Mark 8:18 Jesus says to the disciples: "Do you have eyes, and fail to see?"

"Remembering', together with perceiving, understanding, seeing, and hearing, is an essential part of the process of enlightenment in which they have been so conspicuously unsuccessful" (R T France, *The Gospel of Mark: a commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002, 317). We are reminded of Isaiah 6:9: "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and

turn and be healed” (Isaiah 6:9-10 – NRSV. See also to Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; Psalm 115:5–6.)

“Jesus thus charges his disciples with being no better off than the ‘outsiders’ to whom that text has already been applied. Their privileged insight into the secret of the kingdom of God seems for now to have deserted them. The specific use of the metaphor of blindness prepares the way for the next pericope, where the healing of a blind man will be used to symbolise the enlightenment which the disciples so obviously need. Jesus’ attempt to provide that enlightenment, set over against the continued obtuseness of the disciples, will be a major theme of Act Two of Mark’s gospel, now about to begin. At the same time the metaphor of deafness recalls the recently narrated healing of the deaf man, a miracle which is in many ways closely parallel to that of the blind man at Bethsaida. The present pericope, with its focus on spiritual obtuseness, is thus framed between two literal miracles of perception” (R T French, op cit, 318).

“The story of this blind beggar who ironically sees Jesus more clearly than those with two good eyes climaxes Mark’s teaching on faith and discipleship” (J R Edwards, op cit, 328).

Specific

a large crowd: “These may have been inhabitants of Jericho, or other pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem for Passover, or a combination of the two” (J R O’Donohue and D J Harrington, op cit, 317).

have mercy on me: The beggar does not ask for money but mercy. The beggar reminds us all that what is on offer in Jesus is not worldly goods.

What do you want me to do for you?: We have just heard Jesus ask this question of James and John – see Mark 10:35-36. How different the circumstances! The two disciples seek prestige and status, the beggar cries out for mercy and the ability to “see”. It is this ability to see that the disciples lack but do not yet recognize the need to ask for it.