

Homily for 9am Service on Sunday 27th October 2024 – The Last Sunday after Trinity

Texts: Jeremiah 31:7-9; Mark 10:46-end

‘What do you want me to do for you?’

Last year I had an experience which may ring chords with any of you who have sought to bring joy to children or grandchildren, only to find it backfired. On this occasion, I went with a grandchild to Hamleys – a vast toy shop in London. I thought they would love it but the sheer scale of the shops was overwhelming. There were so many floors and on each, a bewildering array of novelties - flying dinosaurs, PlayStation 5, Disney characters, board games and many other gimmicks which assaulted the senses. It was very hard to think let alone discern what toy they might wish. In the end, we left, relieved to be out of maelstrom and resolved that we'd give ourselves time to think – what do I really want?

It can be similar for us as adults. Not that we want a flying dinosaur or the latest computer game, but to be so overwhelmed with all we see and encounter in our daily lives, that we no longer see clearly what is really going on. Just a few examples of this. We get swept up in the blandishments of all the attractions and online advertising persuading us to buy more and more, and as Christmas approaches, these messages intensify. Now that we live in a world with multiple sources of news, it's often difficult to tell which source is true so there is a great temptation for us to believe the source that's giving the message we want to hear. And there is great pressure for us 'To get on in the world'- to be successful as the world measures success.

On one level – we have more information at our fingertips than any generation before us – we are in a unique position to see clearly, to decide what we really want and to strive for it. But the problem is that we are often spiritually blind and thus end up making choices which can be damaging both for us and for others. Yet just occasionally we encounter those who appear to be blind to the attractions of the world and yet are guided by an inner wisdom which enables them to see what is really happening in the world.

This isn't a new phenomenon. In Greek tragedy, there is a long and famous tradition of the 'blind prophet' who whilst being physically blind, sees with devastating clarity what is happening and speaks out. A famous example of this is the blind prophet Tiresias. He appears in Sophocles' play *Antigone*, warning King Creon that his pride will lead to his downfall'. In another play by Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, Tiresias is summoned by Oedipus to find the cause of the dreadful plague which has gripped the city of Thebes. The blind prophet sees with devastating clarity, that the plague is due to the evil Oedipus has committed but Oedipus, despite his physical sight, blindly refuses to accept the truth.

Blind Bartimaeus in our gospel reading today also 'saw' the inner truth despite his physical blindness. How did he hear of Jesus? We can only imagine that he heard stories from friends and passers-by, of this remarkable man who healed the sick,

was turning the existing order upside down and was proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom. Through prayer and reflection, he had discerned who Jesus was and longed to meet him. That's why, when he hears that Jesus is coming along the road, he shouts with every breath in his body, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me". Despite attempts of those with Jesus who tell him to keep quiet, he persists and meets Jesus who challenges him to tell him what he is really seeking. Bartimaeus was absolutely clear – he wanted Jesus to enable him to see again and to his joy, he receives this gift for which he longed

This gospel story reminds us that we are not condemned to be buffeted by what we physically see and encounter in the world. We too can listen to that inner voice of God within us and 'see' the truth with an inner sight including our deepest desires. So today is an opportunity to let this gospel reading speak to us and where we are in our lives today. We can put ourselves into this story, imagining we are blind Bartimaeus. As we encounter Jesus, what would be the gift we would ask of Him?

What is our deepest desire? Is it healing from a physical illness, or a worry which is taking over our life? Is it healing and reconciliation in a relationship breakdown which seeks to be intractable? Is it courage to speak out against an injustice? The opportunity to change something which feels stuck in our lives? Or something else?

It's also important to think of what we would do with this gift if we did receive it from Jesus. Bartimaeus wanted his sight so that he could follow Jesus, to see and experience all that Jesus was doing and teaching first-hand so that in time, he too could teach others to find the way to God's kingdom. What will we do?

Whatever we seek, and in whatever state we are at just now, we can come to Jesus in hope and confidence that he will receive us and set us on a good path, Unlike the gods of Greek tragedy who condemned humankind to live with the full consequences of their blindness and sin, we know that we worship a God who longs for us to turn to Him whatever we have done or failed to do.

In the wonderfully tender passage from the prophet Jeremiah we heard just now, God describes how he will create a straight path for those who have endured the anguish of exile on account of their own pride and spiritual blindness. God will welcome them back and will create a straight path so that even those who are blind, whether physically or spiritually, will find their way back to him without being hurt.

And Jesus describes himself as the one who hasn't come for the righteous but sinners and has given us the wonderful image of God as the father of the Prodigal Son who longs for him to return and rushes out to embrace and accept him when he finally returns.

So, wherever we are in our lives today, let's draw tremendous hope and encouragement from knowing that God always welcomes us back. In that assurance, let's pray this week for inner sight and wisdom so that we may discern the gift we are seeking from God and clarity to know what we will do with it.

Amen

The Revd Canon Dr Daphne Green