



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road
roswell, georgia 30076

29-Oct-2006

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 59:7-13 Mark 10:48-52

SERMON: Jericho Brouhaha (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

A guy bought a new fridge for his house. To get rid of his old fridge, he put it in his front yard and hung a sign on it saying: "Free to good home. You want it, you take it." For three days the fridge sat there without even one person looking twice at it. He eventually decided that people were too untrusting of this deal. It looked too good to be true, so he changed the sign to read: "Fridge for sale \$50." The next day someone stole it. *They Walk Among Us!*

One day I was walking down the beach with some friends when someone shouted, "Look at that dead bird!" Someone looked up at the sky and said, "Where?" *They Walk among us!!*

I used to work in technical support for a 24/7 call center. One day I got a call from an individual who asked what hours the call center was open. I told him, "The number you dialed is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week." He responded, "Is that Eastern or Pacific time?" Wanting to end the call quickly, I said, "Uh, Pacific" *They Walk Among Us!!!*

My colleague and I were eating our lunch in our cafeteria, when we overheard one of the administrative assistants talking about the sunburn she got on her weekend drive to the shore. She drove down in a convertible, but "didn't think she'd get sunburned because the car was moving". *They Walk Among Us!!!!*

I couldn't find my luggage at the airport baggage area. So I went to the lost luggage office and told the woman there that my bags never showed up. She smiled and told me not to worry because she was a trained professional and I was in good hands. "Now," she asked me, "has your plane arrived yet?" *They Walk Among Us!!!!*

They Walk Among Us! Or actually "They Sit among us!" was what the crowd were thinking and feeling that day in Jericho when poor, old, blind, crazy, smelly, pitiful Bartimaeus kept on shouting and screaming and making a fuss and trying to get Jesus' attention. Oh how embarrassing for him to make a spectacle of himself. Can't someone shut him up?

To Jesus, this *Jericho brouhaha* was not a bother. And today, as we allow all that happened to get inside of us we have much to gain for this *Jericho brouhaha* reveals a lot about who Jesus is, about how Jesus deals with people, and what Jesus expects from us as we live as disciples and followers of Jesus today!

Thanks to this *Jericho brouhaha*, everything is about to come into focus! Not only blind Bartimaeus, but everybody is about to be given the opportunity to "see" again. Suddenly quiet and respectful after his extended outburst, Bartimaeus finds himself in the presence of Jesus. Jesus asks him a question that I hope you will recognize from last week's Gospel reading. Jesus asks Bart, "What do you want me to do for you?" This is the very same question that we heard Jesus ask last week when James and John made their very unsavory request of Jesus, asking that they be granted season tickets for the Masters, a box at the Met, a skybox suite for the Superbowl, plus very special recognition and privileges in the Kingdom of God! They received a very curt and, to them, unsatisfactory answer! To this same question "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus offers a much more appropriate answer. The two star-struck brothers from last week are like Mayor Quimby: looking for recognition and the best seats. Bart is fulfilling the promise of the kingdom sign that the blind will see!

From Bartimaeus we discover that to see with the eyes of faith is to have eyes wide open! To underline this point, Mark chose to place this incident immediately before the report of Jesus' Triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. You see everything was coming into focus, just as Jesus had promised! Everything was about to be made clear, in the only way that was possible! Everybody was about to have the opportunity to see, *to really see*, all because Jesus was about to reach and enter where His road needed to take Him: Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the holy city, where Jesus would be condemned and arrested and flogged and spat upon and taken off to die, bearing in His life the weight of the world's rejection of God so we could be welcomed by God. And so it is that Bartimaeus is the first to raise the "Son of David" shout that will be echoed in the events of Palm Sunday! "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed is the One who comes in the Name of the Lord."

As the result of this encounter, Bart followed Jesus. You see Bart and Homer, and Marge, and Lisa and Maggie and Grandpa... they could all follow Jesus like Ned Flanders!!! Just as you and I can follow, having recognized who Jesus truly is! Coming to see our lives and our world in the light of Jesus all of us can follow Jesus!

As Jesus invited Bartimaeus to follow, so Christ calls us to a new way of life. The faith we have inside of us, which we share with those around us and with the Church of every age and place, the faith that is God's gift to us, is the faith of Jesus Christ.

The faith of Jesus Christ opens our eyes to see God's love transforming our lives and so we follow!

The faith of Jesus Christ opens our eyes to see God's love present and active to change our world and so we follow!

The faith of Jesus Christ in God's love brings to us a starting over, a beginning again, a turning around, a new direction, an extreme makeover inside and so we follow!

The faith of Jesus Christ, that God holds us and the world in love, describes our life's work and our life's purpose, our vocation, our calling, and so we follow!

Many of us here today have said, and are saying, our "Yes" to Jesus. Some are still to say and mean our first "Yes" to following Jesus! *Not one of us has yet said our complete and total "YES" to following Jesus!*

My friends this is why Jesus comes into the brouhaha of your life to ask you, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus had to throw aside his cloak to take those first difficult, unseen, uncertain steps towards Jesus. *What is it that you need to throw aside so you will be free to follow Jesus? Pride? Prejudice? Anger? Jealousy? Resentment? Fear? Past failures?*

Bartimaeus had to lay down his cloak to start out on what became a new life's journey. *What is it that cloaks who you really and truly are, obscuring, masking your true identity and destiny as a child of God that must be laid down? Trusting in wealth? Over reliance on self? Dependence on that which can only harm you if you let it define your life – whisky or pot or crack or porn?*

Bartimaeus had to step away from his beggar's perch, to leave behind the familiar, to step forward into a new tomorrow, to leave his usual corner and step out onto the highway. *What corners of your existence do you need to be ready to leave? The places that are so familiar to you, that have a known look and smell but hold no promise for tomorrow? The people and relationships that drag you into bad places? The fears that eat away at your God-given promise? The aches and itches that distract?*

Bartimaeus had to be ready to risk so much, maybe even his all to discover in following Jesus a guarantee of life, and hope, and peace and joy. *To what extent are you ready to risk much so that you can follow Jesus and so be able to accept the lasting blessing of God on your life?*

The fact that we know Bartimaeus' name implies that he was known in the early church. Bart was one of them, one of us, one who followed Jesus! Unlike the rich man, Mr. Burns, who turned away, because he was a rich man, Bart followed Jesus!

I tell you that it is the *compassion* of Jesus that changed Bartimaeus' life. It is the *compassion* of Jesus that has changed and continues to change my life. It is the *compassion* of Jesus that I see in you as you live and serve and give and share. Compassion is the spirit of the way of Jesus Christ all the way to the Cross, through the Cross and beyond the Cross and therefore compassion must be and needs to be the spirit of the Christian community as together we follow Jesus!

This is the day for following in response to the deep, lasting, tender *compassion* that Jesus has for you. Today you are invited to recognize the Bartimaeus in you, in your life. We know, don't we, our need for care, guidance and compassion in our lives? On our own, we know we are lost, despite all our best intentions when we live without reference to our Lord we are sunk! The *compassion* of Jesus is such that we are asked to reach out to Jesus, the Son of David for our life, for our healing and our salvation!

This is the day to allow this deep and lasting compassion of Jesus to motivate us into action, to change who we live, to stir in us new thoughts, new feelings, new attitudes towards one another, towards all our neighbors, towards even our enemies. As we come to see again and to see rightly we are asked not just to see God's compassion we are also asked to see not just "Ugly Betty", but the ugliness of poverty and injustice, the utter repugnance that God has for prejudice, hatred, oppression. Having seen the beauty of love and the ugliness where love is lacking we are asked to follow, to be faithful and to affect change after God's pattern and inclination.

This is the day to allow God's compassion for us, for the church and for the world to express itself by means of what we pledge and commit from all that we have for God's mission expressed in the life of our congregation. *This is the day* to pledge and promise expressing our desire to live faithfully as followers of Jesus Christ.

There is a sense in which today we re-enact the story of Bartimaeus, for later in the Service, during the final hymn we look and see, we get up out of our seats, where we have might have been hiding and we come forward to show that we are ready to follow Jesus! Our good friend, Walter Jones, and I have sometimes discussed whether anyone ever changes the amount of their offering on any given Sunday in the light of the sermon they hear! I will leave you to ponder that thought but I am sure that many of us could change, update, upgrade, increase the pledge we have currently written down on our pledge card – not because of this or any sermon, but in response to the compassion of Jesus who invites all of us to step forward and step out in faith and joy to follow Jesus together and do the work to which Jesus calls us in and through the life of Northminster Presbyterian Church. *This is the Day* for following, for taking the significance and meaning of the Jericho brouhaha and allowing the experience to change us and reform us. *This is the day* to be God's people generous and grateful; ready to give to God gladly a goodly proportion of all the good that God has given to us; so that God's grace may be given and granted and gifted to us and to all – guaranteed! Gracious a good many "g's" – but just to show that I know all my alphabet – listen to and follow this sentence:

As blessed Christians Get it ABC ...follow along now... As blessed Christians declaring earnest faith, giving honor in Jesus, keeping less money, Northminster openhandedly pledges, quite rightly striding to upping, very willingly, extending y'all's zeroes.

Is that sentence alone not worth something more on your pledge? For real, we have so much to give. It is God who is asking, pleading, needing, expecting... *This is the Day for following! Amen.*

Isaiah 59:7-13

7Their feet run to evil, and they rush to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity, desolation and destruction are in their highways. 8The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths. Their roads they have made crooked; no one who walks in them knows peace. 9Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us; we wait for light, and lo! there is darkness; and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. 10We grope like the blind along a wall, groping like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among the vigorous as though we were dead. 11We all growl like bears; like doves we moan mournfully. We wait for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us. 12For our transgressions before you are many, and our sins testify against us. Our transgressions indeed are with us, and we know our iniquities: 13transgressing, and denying the Lord, and turning away from following our God, talking oppression and revolt, conceiving lying words and uttering them from the heart.

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.

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