

The 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Today's Readings

First Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he [Jesus] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:46-52

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.

Situational Awareness

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Early in the week, a story surfaced about a jetliner that over flew its destination by 150 miles. Communication with the cockpit had been lost; fighters were scrambled to check on the aircraft; even the White House was notified. After some 82 minutes, contact with the aircraft was reestablished. At this point, we await the answers as to what took place.

In aviation jargon, there is a general expression for happened: the crew is said to have lost “situational awareness.” They forgot where they were and what they were doing. They missed the mark.

With that in mind, I thought it might be cool to do a little situational awareness of our own.

In Mark’s Gospel this morning, we have Bartimaeus calling out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Those following of Jesus out of Jericho, disciples included, sternly ordered Bartimaeus to be quiet.

Let’s try it, let’s everyone start talking to one another, as if we were in a big crowd with Jesus in our midst. I’m going to make believe that I am Bartimaeus out here on the fringe of the crowd calling out. And you respond like the follower. Ready...

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

OK, good. Now, let me ask you, “Is there something wrong with what just took place?”

Yup. Seems that the disciples lost “situational awareness” and then some.

Our first reading of Hebrews, written by Paul, is a message to the Hebrews that Jesus would always be with them, even though there were other forces trying to undermine the forming movement.

And it’s a good thing that Jesus is always with us, because if it were not for Jesus, Bartimaeus might still be sitting on the side of the road, outside the city of Jericho, a place where the unclean, poor, and oppressed were relegated to beg for alms and the mercy of passers-by.

It was just in last week’s reading that Jesus asked of two disciples who came to him, “What is it you would like me to do for you?”

Remember, James and John wanted to get the best seats in the new kingdom? And Jesus asked them if they were willing to drink the cup he was about to drink? Ultimately, Jesus tells John and James in full witness of the others – that to be first, they needed to be last. They needed to be a servant of all others.

Well, based on this morning's reading of Mark, they still hadn't gotten it. Here is one of the least among them, Bartimeaeus, and what did they do when he called out?

Scolded him! Told him to be quiet!

But Jesus hears him, Jesus *hears* him, and tell the others to bring Bartimaeus to him.

When they do bring him forward Jesus asks Bartimaeus the same question he asked of James and John in last week's reading, "What is it you would like me to do for you?"

Bartimaeus asks to see.

Jesus tells him that his faith has healed him and to go on his way. But, instead of leaving, Bartimaeus follows Jesus.

Not only did Bartimaeus gain his sight, he maintained his situational awareness. He knew where he was and what he was doing. He knew this was Jesus, the Son of David. He called him by name. And Jesus did not tell him to be quiet.

There would be enough of a message here, were we to leave the readings and comments at this point. However, there is much more in this passage.

Aside from the announcement and tacit acknowledgment of Jesus that he was the Son of David, perhaps, the most intriguing aspect of the reading is that the question that Jesus asked the disciples and Bartimaeus is the same question he asks of us who come to him: "What would you like me to do for you?"

Have you thought about that and what it means to reply to such a question: "What would you like me to do for you?"

Mark's gospel is filled with examples of the answer to that question through a series of the missteps of others in the earlier readings of his gospel.

The first blind person who came to Jesus was in Chapter 8:28 ff. You may recall the story. Jesus takes a blind man outside of the town (again on the fringes).

There Jesus mixes spittle in his hand and places it on the eyes of the blind person. Jesus asks him, "Do you see anything?" The man said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Then Jesus put his hands on Him again and

the man's sight is completely restored.

Jesus chooses to restore the man's sight in stages, and most biblical followers believe that this earlier story in Mark is told to demonstrate that the disciples are learning in stages. Their faith is growing, albeit slowly, into a clearer vision. In other words, it takes time.

A message here – among others:

Don't rush the Spirit. Stay on the path...let the Spirit lead you.

More of Mark:

Remember the story of the Rich man. It appears just before Bartimaeus. The rich man comes up to Jesus and says, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" When the rich man assures Jesus that he has lived faithfully according to the laws, Jesus loves him for his faith and tells him he is missing just one thing. "Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come and follow me." The Gospel says that the man left saddened, for he had many possessions, which we assume he did not want to give up.

A message to follow don't rush the Spirit?

Don't hold on either. Be willing to let go of whatever is in the way of us and God.

In Bartimaeus the teachings come together.

In this last of the healing miracles in Mark, Bartimaeus has waited for Jesus of Nazareth. As soon as he knows he is near he calls out until he is heard.

Once he is told to come forth, he throws away his cloak – his only, therefore, most important of possessions.

He asks for his sight, his faith, to be restored.

Immediately it is done...and he follows...into Jerusalem and all that is ahead.

Jerusalem is indeed ahead. The teaching and preparation is coming to a close. The "cup" will soon be known. The disciples and followers (and we, through the translation of time) have all had our lessons.

The path that Jesus has laid out is open to all, especially those on the fringes; for it will be a journey of service and sacrifice – on the path to eternal life, in the eternal that has given us the life before and the one that will follow.

Only you can answer the question, "What is it you want Jesus to do for you?" It is both a personal question that is woven into our individual lives and journey. And, it is a corporate question of us who come here to worship and praise together. It is a question "of me" and "of us."

If you are like me, my request of Jesus and God and Spirit is for the knowledge of God's will and the power to carry that out. It is still unfolding in my life; it has brought me here, I am sure.

And then of us: Our mission at Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House is hinged on service. We are service and fiercely connected to those who are marginalized and pushed aside.

We seek ways to expand our involvement in the mission we share, and, yes, we all can do more. "Self" has a way a slipping in and raising the volume, shading the vision so that we sometimes miss the voices and the images right before us.

And, at the same time, we know our limits. We will always dance in the tension of what we can do to serve others and the knowledge that, as Jesus said, "the poor will always be with you." It is the joy of service living side by side with the frustration and sorrow of those who suffer beyond our reach.

Yet, Hebrews gives us the answer for that, too. Know that God, Jesus, Spirit is always with you. Pray, for as Jesus also said, only certain things are changed by prayer.

So, in the midst of service and such questions we continue together.

The plastic bags behind us are filled with clothing for our sisters and brothers who live on the streets or have barely enough to get by. In the days ahead, as it gets colder, there will be more need than ever for the types of items that are listed on the back of the flyer in your bulletin. You are invited in – as you have invited me – to bring garments you no longer need to help us in our work. You are invited to involve neighbors, friends, family, and others to participate in the privilege we enjoy in serving others. You are invited to join those who gather with us on Tuesday evening for a meal in Pisek Hall, to volunteer to help – or just to sit and chat and come to better know who it is that are called to us.

The Way of Jesus is all about service and the marginalized, poor, imprisoned, ill, lonely...it is our way of service as well. Join with us in any of the ways you can, let us know of those who are in need of the love and service that we practice with a special flavor at Jan Hus, we will help – hard to say how, but as Paul says in Hebrews, there is one who is always with us to help. We can rely on him with all that we are.

Let us not lose situational awareness here on the ground in the midst of those we are called to serve...and let us follow the one who has brought us here.

Amen.