

Nigel Rode Sermon 25th October 2015

Jeremiah 31:7-9, Hebrews 7:23-28, Mark 10: 46-52

Healing of a blind man

To recount some of our Old Testament reading :

“See I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
And gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
Among them the blind and the lame,
.... A great company, they shall return here
.....I will let them walk by brooks of water,
In a straight path in which they shall not stumble;”

Those words were of course by Jeremiah as he prophesied that the Lord God would bring His people out of exile.

However, those words invoked in me a warm reflection of the wonderful few days that some of us from Christ Church recently spent on Iona. We were blessed with wonderful weather that enriched the island’s tranquillity and spirituality, its history and the hospitality of its people. On the Wednesday evening we attended the evening Service in the Abbey. We thought that we would be attending a Communion Service but it turned out to be a Service of re-dedication principally for the Associates of Iona Community, who had come “from the land of the north, and from the farthest parts of the earth” for a reunion and this dedication. It was a very moving Service and it was made all the more poignant for me by a man, probably in his late thirties, who sang the hymns with gusto and affirmed his faith and dedication with firmness and assurance – nothing special in that you might think, except that he was blind.

On the Friday morning we and many of the Associates were queuing for the ferry for our homeward journey. The Associates had been accompanied to the quay by the volunteer helpers from the Abbey and fond farewells were being exchanged. The blind man was just ahead of us in the queue and it was obvious that, amongst all those many people, he knew who were the helpers just by their voices and his thanks were as profuse as all the others; but he was also aware that there were two voices missing, two volunteers who had not come to the quay, so he repeatedly called out, pleading that his appreciation would be conveyed to them.

Not so different a scenario from that in which we heard this morning about the blind beggar, Bartimaeus. He was sitting by the road as Jesus, his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho. We are not told whether Bartimaeus’ lack of sight prevented him from working or whether begging was just the easier option. Either way, he wanted to change his life.

When he heard that all the crowds and commotion were because Jesus was passing by, he called out ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ When the crowd told him to be quiet, he shouted even more loudly; Jesus heard him, stood still and called Bartimaeus to him. Encouraged by the

crowd, he sprang up, and throwing off his cloak went to Jesus. The enormous clue that Mark gives us at that the man was really intent on changing his life, was that he threw away his cloak. The day time temperatures in Jericho are such that he would not have been wearing his cloak – but it would have been onto the cloak that passers-by would have tossed coins in response to his begging. His faith that Jesus would heal him, and his determination for a new life so strong, meant that he would have no further need of it!

Jesus asked Bartimaeus, 'What do you want me to do for you?' to which he replied, simply, 'Teacher, let me see again.'

Jesus said to him 'Go, your faith has made you well' and we are told that his sight was restored and that he followed him on the way, meaning that he became a disciple of Jesus, a Christian.

This is a story of Jesus healing a man with physical blindness, but of course, this miracle story is not intended to be confined to those with loss of physical sight. It is also there as an example to those who might be suffering from spiritual blindness – an inability to see Jesus' message of hope and salvation.

With this in mind, I'd like to share with you an encounter that I and others had this week. It was on Wednesday evening that Christine, Jennie, Jill, Sarah, Virginia, Maggie, David and Richard were with me on the Christ Church catering team at the Bethany Night Shelter where, before the 'guests' arrived, the devotions were led by Brian, a member of the Bethany Staff. He told us how he had been addicted to heroin for 15 years and to methadone for 13 years, he had been homeless and in the same state as some of the guest that we were about to feed, until one day a lady said to him 'God has a plan for you'. That was the call that he needed, the call to change his life around, to build a new life, free of drugs. He is now a most accomplished member of Bethany's management team. Like Bartimaeus, his faith made him well and it's his faith that is keeping him well. Our team back in January heard a similar story from John.

Now, I'd like to set you all some homework. During this coming week I'd like you to spend time imagining, from what you have heard this morning, that you are that blind man on Iona; then imagine you are Bartimaeus; then imagine that you are Brian; ask yourself, by comparison, just how strong is your faith? Then imagine Jesus is coming by, call out to him, and when he summons you, put everything aside and go to him. And when he asks you what you want him to do for you, don't look back at the small, selfish comforts of victimhood, but ask for hope, for salvation. And when you get it, be prepared to follow Jesus wherever he takes you.

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Amen.