



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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OCTOBER 28, 2018
REFORMATION SUNDAY

Get Up!
Jeremiah 31:31-34; Mark 10:46-52

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Have you ever cried out that prayer? "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Obviously, Jesus has not been parading down Sunset Avenue so there has been no opportunity to call out to Jesus, hoping that he might just walk over and have mercy on you. Have you ever cried out for mercy—for yourself, for people you love, for this community, nation, world? I have and I would bet a lottery ticket that you have too!

I said something like that yesterday when I was driving back from Greenville and heard that a synagogue in Pittsburgh had been attacked with six people wounded and eleven killed. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" I said something like that throughout the week as pipe bomb after pipe bomb was found and the threat to life grew more ominous. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those words were in my heart a couple of weeks ago and a few weeks before that when hurricanes—more vicious than we are used to—washed away homes and blew away businesses and, in numerous cases, destroyed life. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

I have whispered those words in the dark of night when worries about children or parents or spouse or self kept the light of anxiety on and would not allow sleep to enter. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" I have said those words when you and I have heard a doctor deliver a fearful diagnosis. I say those words when a marriage ends and when a marriage begins, when a child is born and when someone dies. Those words run through my head and heart when I watch the news, read the paper, and discover the latest social upheaval reported on the internet. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Of course, I don't use that first century phrase and you probably don't either. Often it is simply a "God help us!" that finds its way from my heart to my lips. And most of the time it is silent or at best whispered, not at all bold and brash and presumptive like Bartimaeus: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

I am no Bartimaeus. He heard that Jesus was in his hometown of Jericho and his ears picked up the sounds of a crowd of people going by the road where he begged every day. He heard the name “Jesus” mentioned and could tell when he was nearby. “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”, he yelled, making certain that he would be heard above the din of the crowd. The people near him—friends, perhaps, or at least people who knew him and dropped a coin or two in his cup—these people told him to hush. Mark says that they “sternly ordered him to be quiet.” Think of your mother on Sunday morning during worship. Think of your teacher when the principal came to observe the class. Think of your drill Sargent when you were in basic training. Think of anyone at any time when speaking up is taboo and you will know exactly how they spoke to Bartimaeus.

Sometimes I hear those same voices shushing me. Another hurricane approaches and I ask God for help and those voices tell me that Mother Nature is going to have her way and nothing I or God can do will change that. I see tragedy happening over and over— good, decent, honorable, God-loving people being—and I ask God for help, but those voices remind me that he couldn’t help himself on the cross and won’t do much for me either. I see tension building and division widening and the good will that used to be so prevalent dissipating and I ask God for help and the voices say, “Be quiet! God has better things to do!”

Today is Reformation Sunday. Last year at this time we celebrated the five hundredth anniversary of the occasion when Martin Luther, a German monk, nailed a list of discussion topics to the door of the Wittenberg Church. They were subjects he felt strongly about, items he thought ought to be addressed in order for the Church to remain alive and robust. Those talking points were his plea to God for mercy, but the pope and other officials of the Church, many of his colleagues, numerous of his friends, and people who had never even met him, told him to shut up and sit down. God has entrusted the Church to people who know more than you. God cannot be bothered with our trifling matters.

It is easy to lose steam for those things about which we are passionate when the people around us don’t catch the vision, isn’t it? It is hard to battle on when you fight alone. When the naysayers speak up, our doubts kick in, and it is a lot easier to go silent than to keep shouting into the wind. It is much easier to sit quietly in our pews than it is to let the power of the Gospel send us out into the streets. “Be quiet!” they sternly ordered. Most of us obey.

But not Bartimaeus. We know very little about this fellow. He may have been thirteen or one hundred and three. We know his father's name was Timaeus (thus he was Bartimaeus-the son of Timaeus), but we do not know anything else about his family. We do not know why he is blind. Was he born blind or did he go blind from some illness or was it an accident that caused him to lose his sight? We know he was a beggar which was the only occupation available to people who suffered from any disability or physical challenge. I guess we also know that he didn't listen to his friends because when they told him to be quiet, he yelled all the louder: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus heard him. Above all of the noise of the crowd with animals and children adding to the bedlam, Jesus heard Bartimaeus' voice above all of the noise: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

He might have also heard the people around Bartimaeus telling him to shush because Jesus stopped and said to the people around him, "Call him here." Magically, the friends of Bartimaeus became his cheerleaders. "Take heart; get up, he is calling you," they urged him as if they had been trying to get him to go forward all the time. "Have courage and get up!" they told him. In a flash and with flourish, Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, jumped to his feet, and ran in the direction of Jesus' voice. Because of his faith, Jesus had mercy on him. His sight returned . . . and he became a follower of Jesus.

I do know that the forces of nature are powerful in ways that are both beneficial and harmful to us. I don't believe that God exhales and hurricanes form or inhales and seas grow calm. I believe God created the universe and devised the mechanics of the earth. I know that good and bad things happen to people who are both good and bad. I know that God made us all.

Whether I have just won the lottery or have lost everything I own, whether I have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize or just received a life sentence without possibility of parole, regardless of what I think about health care or abortion or immigration or taxes or the people next door or the people in Washington, like Bartimaeus, I hear Jesus coming near and I can choose to call out or be silent. I can also choose to sit in my misery or have courage and get up.

Martin Luther got up. He had the courage to run to Jesus, not away from him. He paid a severe price, but his need and his passion reminded people of faith through the ages that we are saved by grace through faith. By God's mercy, the spiritual blindness of the time was exposed and much of it

cured. Luther asked Jesus for mercy and then had enough gumption to go get it. We are the better because he did.

Today, when our minds are on attacks on our Jewish brothers and sisters, on bombs sent to former Presidents, elected representatives, and private citizens, on storms that may take away everything that we have, on callous governments that murder not only people but free speech and true liberty, on the rupture that is happening in our own society, and on all of those things in life that suck the joy out of our souls, Jesus does hear us calling out. Our voices, whether screamed or whispered, are heard and Jesus says, "Call her here. Call him here. Call them here." We have the choice to sit still and remain blind or to get up and be able to see again.

Luther showed us what can happen when people of good faith and strong courage endeavor to keep the church faithful to her first love. Luther showed us what is required of people who recognize spiritual and social blindness for what it is and want to see again. Luther acted on his faith and showed us the ways in which God in Christ can bring healing to us all.

There is a lot of blindness among us. Some of us have trouble seeing the value of the person next to us or down the street or across the country or halfway around the world. God can heal our blindness to let us see one another as sisters and brothers. Some of us cannot see that what is good for us may not be good for someone else. God can heal our blind arrogance and show us a way to make life good for all people. Some of us are wrapped up in the cocoons of heritage, party, privilege, revenge, recompense, fear, prejudice, and greed and cannot see how unlike Christ we are. God can heal our blindness and show us how to escape our tombs of death and emerge as beautiful creatures who soar in God's world. Some of us cannot see how precious we are in God's sight. God can heal our blindness and enable us to look at ourselves through holy eyes.

How often do you, in one form or another, whisper or shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me?" And how often do you hear Jesus say, "Come to me"? Listen for the voice of God and take heart. Be of good courage and believe that God can and will heal whatever blindness is preventing you—us—from enjoying life. Have enough courage to let God in Christ re-form your life so that you can see all of the wonders God has created for you. Amen.

October 28, 2018

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Sing your song of joy over us, O God. Catch us in the dance of your grace like leaves twirling on an autumn day. Wrap us in the lyrics of your love until the melody of your Spirit beats within our hearts.

How blessed we are that you take such delight in us, O God. Even when we fail or disappoint you, the gleam of love in your eye never dims nor does the hope in your heart ever wane. Praise be to you, and may our songs of joy always rise up to bless you.

As people who are blessed in every way, we offer our gratitude. We cannot count the blessings we enjoy each day and there is no way to number the gifts that come to us from your immeasurable love. We thank you for all you do for us.

And because we believe in your grace and know your generosity firsthand, we are bold enough to ask for what we truly need, O God. We need help to overcome hatred and injustice. We need a cure for the violence that stalks our cities. We need healing for the wounds that cause us to lash out at one another. We need hope for a world that embodies your goodness toward us all.

We pray for the people of Pittsburgh and for the Tree of Life Synagogue. We pray for healing for the people who were injured and for comfort for everyone who lost a family member or friend. We pray for repentance for the one who acted with such cruelty and for grace when he fully understands his sin. We pray the same for ourselves as we think about our own transgressions of life.

Teach us a new song, O God, a song of life and love and kindness. Teach us a song of joy that recognizes each other as kin and acts toward one another as brother and sister. Teach us to sing as you sing so that the world becomes again the garden of life you intended it to be. Teach us to sing and open our ears to the music of your love. Amen.