

SERMON – October 21 2018 – Mark 10

Blind Faith

Greeting: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Text: Mark 10:51-52 ⁵¹ *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.”* ⁵² *Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.*

I am not sure whether I have previously shared the story about the ‘Leap of Faith’ challenge at *Googa Outdoor Education Centre*, where my brother Dave and his wife Tina used to work?

The ‘Leap of Faith’ was a 10m high pole with a small platform attached on top. 1.8 metres up and away from the platform was a trapeze bar suspended from a major limb of a large Mountain Ash tree. At least I think it was a Mountain Ash, I do know it was a big tree.

Now; the idea of the exercise was to get harnessed up, climb the pole, stand up on the platform, gather your composure; then jump out and catch – well try to catch – the trapeze bar before being safely lowered back to ground, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Most people could safely and jubilantly complete the exercise without much hesitation or screaming. However – there would invariably be 1 or 2 of every group who went through who could not or would not leave the “**safety**” of the platform 10m above ground. No matter what, they just could not be forced or cajoled to take that ‘Leap of Faith’.

If that doesn’t sound freaky enough, some extreme adrenalin junkies would even attempt this challenge **blindfolded!**

Were these adventurers brave, foolhardy or just **plain foolish**? Or, were they exhibiting and exercising their faith? You could say, their **blind faith** in the instructor's and the safety gear they were attached to.

In today's Gospel reading we hear of Bartimaeus, a blind man in the town of Jericho who exhibited all of these characteristics. Yes, he was brave, maybe even a bit foolhardy; the locals, even his other blind compatriots, certainly thought that he was acting foolishly. But I think blind Bartimaeus was actually teaching all of us a brilliant lesson about FAITH!

This text is also told in Matthew and Luke's Gospels. All three accounts reinforce the idea that Jesus' stopover in Jericho was by no means coincidental or an accidental happening. After all, as we are reminded again and again, *with Jesus there are NO coincidences!*

Jesus had already 'turned His face toward Jerusalem'; He was on His way to fulfil His ultimate purpose and calling.

Several commentaries on this miracle note that the restoration of sight for Bartimaeus is not the main message to come out of this story. Yes; it is wonderful that Jesus restored his sight, but the more important message is, why? Why did Jesus stop and heal this particular man? After all, He had already restored the sight of other blind people during His travels around the Judean and Samaritan countryside.

Why? Luke's Gospel account of this story tells us that Jesus had already *passed through* Jericho, and it was on His way out of town that He called Zacchaeus out of the Sycamore tree. This is yet more proof that, *with Jesus there are no coincidences*. Jesus would not have had His encounter with Bartimaeus unless Zacchaeus had invited Jesus to dinner and He had returned to the town.

By the way; Bartimaeus was not the only blind man healed upon Jesus' return to Jericho. Bartimaeus' blind companions were also healed. So why is only Bartimaeus mentioned by name?

This is where the lesson about faith becomes obvious.

Bartimaeus gets a mention because he was ‘the squeaky wheel’, and like squeaky wheels everywhere, he got noticed! Bartimaeus’ raucous bellowing’s rose above the din of the crowd following Jesus and also above the protestations of Jesus’ disciples. But Bartimaeus was squeaking with good purpose, his bellowing came from a deep-rooted faith!

Jesus did not stop to heal the blind men just because of the shouting though, He stopped because of **what** Bartimaeus was shouting.

Bartimaeus, having found out that it was Jesus of Nazareth reentering town, constantly and, obviously loudly, called out; *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*

Bartimaeus, in his blindness saw that this *Jesus of Nazareth* was not your every-day common Jesus (the name Jesus was as common in those areas as John or Graham or Geoff is in our congregation).

Bartimaeus called Jesus by His Messianic title; *Jesus, Son of David.*

Did you know that this incidence is the first time that Jesus openly *allows* Himself to be identified as the Messiah? The only time He had previously revealed His true identity was to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well, where He calls Himself *the I AM*. (John 4:25-26). *The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”*²⁶ *Jesus said to her, “I am He, the one who is speaking to you.”* Jesus knew that His time of earthly ministry was coming to an end, He had turned toward His ultimate destination. His face was toward Jerusalem – to Golgotha.

Friends; what Bartimaeus did was way more than an act of bravery, foolhardiness, or even foolishness. **This was an act of FAITH! – Blind Faith!**

I believe that the language and grammar used by Mark in writing this account is telling. The term *He began to shout* is written in such a way as to portray a sense of an ongoing call – not just a once-off shout.

Bartimaeus continued to shout out Jesus' Messianic name, which is what we are called to do too.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing;

Power and majesty, praise to The King!

As the text tells us, Bartimaeus' faith statement won the day. Jesus stops and heals him. But it is what Jesus actually says in the act of healing that is most telling and most remarkable. Mark 10:52 tells us; *Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well."*

Once again, as we see all through Jesus' ministry, He has the final say – **and He still does!** It was not Bartimaeus' ranting and raving that compelled Jesus to answer his call, it was his **FAITH!**

Friends, this message is ageless; it's the same message now and will be the same message until eternity.

St Paul knew this and Martin Luther emphasized this exact same point.

We are justified (saved) by God's grace, through FAITH, and not by any works or loud bellowings we may make – ***Faith alone, Grace alone and Christ alone are our salvation.***

Next weekend we will once again celebrate this very fact as we commemorate the Reformation of The Church.

Yes folks; Bartimaeus and his blind mate/s give us a fabulous example of faith. But they also give us an amazing example of how to express our faith – **LOUDLY!**

They saw they had this one chance to grab Jesus' attention and they knew it may never come again. This is exactly the same message for us today.

We have this one chance while we are here in this worldly existence to make a noise and bring Jesus to the attention of the world around us. We don't need to necessarily express our faith in daring ways like taking the 'Leap of Faith' at a challenge course at

'Googa' or 'Tandara'. We can be like blind Bartimaeus and throw caution to the wind and speak up, sing up and pray.

So friends; sing up, speak up and pray without reservation or hesitation – and not just here within the safe walls of the church – do it in your community too! In doing so you will be publicly declaring your faith and Jesus will have no hesitation but to say to you; ***Go, your faith has made you well and saves you.***

Amen.