

**Homily, St. Andrew's**  
**Proper 30B, Oct 25, 2015**  
**Mark 10:46-52**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Today is the beginning of the end. It is a time of year when the summer that was is truly over but the winter yet to come has not yet arrived. Here in late fall, the leaves are mostly off the trees and the beauty of the changing colours has mostly given way to dull brown, as nature awaits the arrival of snow. Liturgically we are nearing the end as the Reign of Christ approaches. By the end of next month, a mere 5 weeks away, we will begin a new year with the hope and anticipation of Advent. This means we have 4 more weeks of growing in the Spirit of God before we turn the page on the year.

Our Gospel passage today also marks the beginning of the end in Mark's telling of Jesus' story. With this story of healing, Jesus' ministry outside Jerusalem concludes, for the very next scene has him triumphantly entering Jerusalem. Today, however, Jesus and his disciples are still on the road, travelling from Jericho where a blind beggar named Bartimaeus is sitting by the roadside. When he learns that it is Jesus of Nazareth who is passing by in the crowd, he shouts out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The first response of those in the crowd is to order him, sternly, to keep quiet "shhh!" But undeterred, he shouts out all the more loudly: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Bartimaeus would be a terrible Anglican. Such shouting is not dignified; it is not proper or polite; it is definitely not the way we do things. There is something so uncomfortable about this boisterous and unrelenting determination to be acknowledged... to be seen. And so our response, like that of the crowd, is often to command silence: "shhh!"

Bartimaeus is the one who is blind, but I wonder how many in the crowd, even Jesus himself, how many... were blind to Bartimaeus and his need before he began to shout out and protest against their blindness? I wonder if those who sternly order him to silence are uncomfortable because Bartimaeus' determination to be seen - even in his weakness, even in his imperfection, even in his need? I wonder if his courage to be seen and risk rejection, hurt, heartbreak, failure pushed emotional buttons in the crowd, prompting them to command silence? I wonder if Bartimaeus had always had such courage or if there was something in this moment... something in his understanding of Jesus as "Son of David," that gave him such courage, or such desperation, on this day?

A few weeks back, I talked about Brene Brown's work around courage, vulnerability, and shame. She has recently released her third book, titled "Rising Strong." In the introduction, she describes the logical flow of the 3 books. In her first, "The Gifts of Imperfection," she issues a clarion call to "be you!" Be fully who you are, with all your imperfections. She followed that with a call to "be all in!" in the book "Daring Greatly." These first 2 books are, in her words, "'call to arms' books. They are about having the courage to show up and be seen even if it means risking failure, hurt, shame and possibly even heartbreak. Why? Because hiding out, pretending and armouring up against vulnerability are killing us: killing our spirits, our hopes, our potential, our creativity, our ability to lead, our love, our faith, and our joy... these books have resonated so

strongly with people, [because] we're sick of being afraid and we're tired of hustling for our self-worth." (xix)

We don't know anything about Bartimaeus' backstory, what got him to that moment on the roadside... maybe his life had been difficult enough, for long enough... maybe he was sick of being afraid and tired of hustling... maybe he had nothing left to lose. What we do know is that he had the courage and the gall to shout out his need as Jesus passed by... Bartimaeus didn't let the resistance of those in the crowd who would silence him, stop him. Today, Bartimaeus had the courage to show up and insist on being seen, in the hope of gaining a more wholehearted life. Bartimaeus shouted until his blindness no longer had power over those around him. Bartimaeus shouted until the blindness around him was healed... until Jesus heard him and called back to him.

At Jesus' call, Bartimaeus wasted no time, throwing off his cloak and springing up to go to Jesus. I wonder what he expected as he moved to face Jesus... a kind word perhaps? a gentle touch? some fancy miracle? I wonder what the disciples and others in crowd expected? I bet none of them expected Jesus to ask the same question he'd asked of James and John earlier in the trip: "What do you want me to do for you?"

It seems like an odd question given what seems like an obvious need, and yet maybe that's not the point. "What do you want me to do for you?" is a question that asks for deeper connection through a personal encounter, without the shouting! If you have ever expressed your need, your deepest desire, that most personal want in your life, to another and been rejected or refused, you know just how tender and difficult a moment this could be. Jesus asks Bartimaeus to trust him more and simply state his desire - calmly, honestly, without the drama. What do you want me to do for you? It is a moment of great vulnerability and risky intimacy played out in a crowd. And it is a story of healing because Bartimaeus has the courage to show up and be seen in his answer: "My Teacher, let me see again."

At Parish Council this past week, we took the time to discuss the results of the survey about worship intentions and preferences at Christmas. I had been considering options as surveys came in and had discussed it with the wardens the week before. So at Parish Council I more or less announced a decision to have only a 5:00pm service on Christmas Eve, and a service Christmas morning... "unless you can convince me otherwise." It was my way of inviting the group to "show up and be seen" by expressing their agreement or dissent... and the 'why' behind it. We heard several stories of personal family traditions and reflections about both our current community and what those outside of our community might want and in the end, enough of a case was made to include a 7:00pm option that we will try that for this year. It is not what everyone wanted because we can't actually accommodate every individual family circumstance, but I appreciate the courage of everyone to express their thoughts and their desires.

The reason that Brene Brown wrote the third book "Rising Strong" is because, as the subtitle says: "If we are brave enough, often enough, we will fall. This is a book about what it takes to get back up." Brown acknowledges that when we choose to show up and be seen... to express our desire, to risk being ourselves and go all in, to put ourselves out there and love with our whole hearts, then we're going to experience hurt and heartbreak, failure and embarrassment. At a meeting this week about one part of a new ministry initiative around end-of-life care and physician-assisted suicide, concern was expressed about the risk involved... what if we fall flat

on our faces? Worse, what if it's successful and lots of people show up and we're overwhelmed? What if we say what we want Jesus to do for us and it doesn't work out? We deal with whatever comes... hard times are an inevitable consequence of taking risks but the potential rewards are worth it. More, the alternative is living only half-heartedly, and Jesus calls us to more. And so instead of hiding or backing away or playing it safe, we can learn to rise strong when we fall, and continue to be brave.

As this season of growth in the Holy Spirit has moved along through this fall, I realized that my greatest desire for growth in this community, as it relates to worship, is about being more fully present. And so I've asked liturgical assistants to be present at the altar and to be involved in setting it. Changes to the liturgy mean that everyone has to pay greater attention to the details while the basic flow remains constant. As those things continue, I encourage you to lift your head and heart and soul out of the book, to be more present in this sanctuary, to show up to be present to God and to one another with all of who you are, to trust that you know how worship flows beyond the words in the book, and to offer more of who you are to those around you. Beginning next week, we will express this offering of ourselves to God and to one another liturgically by parish members bringing the gifts of bread of wine forward to the altar at the beginning of the offertory. This liturgical change serves to symbolize that while the grace of God may always be in this place, the mystery of sacrament only works when we show up with our offerings, to be seen by God.

In the end, Bartimaeus' risk of authenticity in expressing his desire had Jesus acknowledge the source of the healing: "Go; your faith has made you well." More than physical cure, it was Bartimaeus' faith in being willing to put himself out there; to stand up to those who would silence his cry and persevere; to honestly express his desire: "let me see again..." That is the faith that brought healing... Faith that he could play a role in healing the blindness of others to his need and faith that renewed sight was possibly with Jesus.

May our blindness to the needs of others be healed and may we too find the courage and trust of Bartimaeus to honestly express our greatest desires as we seek to answer Jesus' query: "What do you want me to do for you?" Come what may.