



Personal service 24 October 2021 – written by Revd Madeleine Andrews

O God who created the heavens and stretched them out,

We praise you!

You fashioned the earth and all that lives there,

We praise you!

You give breath to the people upon it,

And Spirit to those who walk on it.

We praise and thank you, O God!

That the eyes of the blind be opened,

The broken hearted be healed,

The poor hear the good news,

The captives be brought out of darkness,

Your kingdom come, O Lord.

Your will be done.

So shall we sing a new song, O Lord,

And praise your name forever.

Daytime liturgy 2 from *A Wee Worship Book*, copyright The Iona Community

StF 103 /HP 36 God is love: let heaven adore him

Prayer

Loving God, we come as we are, in our wounded humanity, to praise you, to give you thanks for the life you have given us, for being part of your life in the world. We thank you for the gifts of other people, for the love we have received, for those we love. We thank you for the earth on which we depend, for the complexity of the natural world, that we may learn how to honour and nurture it.

God who cares for all you have made, we confess that we have often been thoughtless and unconscious of the effect of our actions on other people, we have seen life through the lens of our own self-interest or habitual responses. Forgive our inner blindness, open our eyes and hearts, and renew our loving. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

OT reading - Jeremiah 31: 7-9

Gospel - Mark 10: 46-52

StF 410 /HP 774 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking

Reflection

It's not always easy to sort out what we want from what we need - the box of chocolates or the bowl of fruit! But Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, has enough sense of what he needs to jump up and shout for it. The story is recorded by Mark as taking place just after the incident with James and John squabbling over their status in the kingdom of God. The disciples do not see or understand. They are on the road to Jerusalem, the place of challenge, the

place of death for Jesus. This is the climax of the part of the gospel which spells out the meaning of discipleship. Bartimaeus is sitting at the side of the road, on the ground. There is a large crowd escorting Jesus - a way of showing honour.

Bartimaeus depends on his ears to know what's going on. He hears that all the noise is about Jesus who is coming near, so he shouts out, addressing Jesus as 'Son of David', a messianic title, and therefore politically dangerous. It is a way of identifying Jesus publicly as 'King of the Jews'; it marks the beginning of the Passion story.

The people in the crowd sternly shut him up, but Bartimaeus shouts out again, more loudly. The crowd is hostile, they attempt to marginalise and silence Bartimaeus - perhaps they are frightened, and don't want to attract the attention of the Roman authorities.

Jesus tells his disciples to call Bartimaeus, who is summoned for an audience with a celebrity! The tone of the crowd seems to change abruptly, from insulting him to encouraging him - 'Take heart, get up...' and they escort him to Jesus. We are told that Bartimaeus 'sprang up' - he's alive, he is being responded to as a person of worth and possibility. He throws off his cloak (perhaps the only possession he had?) leaving himself totally vulnerable, naked. He leaves behind whatever money people might have thrown on the ground, and goes to Jesus. Beggars in Middle Eastern society at the time were recognised as part of the community; they enabled the pious to be seen to carry out deeds of mercy, and so gain a reputation for being honorable, compassionate, etc. Beggars would sit in a public place and challenge passers-by. When a beggar received money, he would often stand up and proclaim the virtues of the giver, invoking blessings on him and his family - so everyone gained!

Bartimaeus would have enjoyed certain benefits, despite the difficulties and humiliations of his situation. So Jesus' question 'What do you want me to do for you?' is challenging. The blind man would have had no education, no marketable skills, no experience. If his sight is restored, he would have to find work, which might not be easy. Is it therefore in his interest to remain blind? Does he want such a disruption in his life, does he want the responsibility of 'new life'?

It seems as though Jesus recognises in Bartimaeus something which is not about being able to see, physically. He detects a yearning for God, the insight of someone who has faith - in contrast with the disciples, who often seem to fail to understand Jesus and what he is about. Bartimaeus has faith that Jesus has the power of God to heal, that Jesus has compassion on the poor and oppressed, and believes that Jesus is the hope of Israel, the Messiah, and so Jesus is able to make him whole, to fulfil his need to be a disciple. 'Son of David' is an inadequate title, but the blind man sees more than those with sight.

What we see, and what we don't choose to see or want to see, is a factor in all our lives. Back in 2018, I visited Israel and the West Bank. In 1948 the government of the new Israeli state demolished lots of Palestinian villages, making some 700,000 people refugees. They were forced to flee to what became refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, as well as the West Bank; their families and descendants are still there. Israeli settlers have built their own communities on Palestinian land, but in places the rubble of Palestinian villages remains. When settlers see the rubble, what do they see? Or do they not see it at all, in any real sense?

Israel is a highly segregated society in which discrimination is institutionalised. The Wall of Separation has been built supposedly to protect Israelis from attack by Palestinians - the message given is that all Palestinians are terrorists. This separation is profoundly damaging for Israelis, for Jews as well as Palestinians, because it destroys trust, and creates fear of 'the other', which is constantly reinforced. But there are many Israelis and Palestinians of vision and courage and faith and hope, who see the reality, and contradict the Israeli government's agenda of fear, by working to make links of support and peace.

Jewish and Christian scriptures open to us a God of mystery, a God of longing who reaches out to us in love, who makes space for us, gives us a place to live, alongside each other, and gives us the gift of each other, so that we may learn what love means.

Christian faith is about life in all its fullness. The prophet Jeremiah paints a picture of hope for the peoples of Israel and Judah, after the judgement and humiliation of exile. God is seen as the shepherd and keeper, who will gather in the people - the weak, the blind and lame, pregnant women, and children - and bring them home. There is a picture here of longing for home, belonging, wholeness, 'salvation'. Bartimaeus' faith and longing were met by the faithfulness of God, and he was 'brought home' by Jesus. For Jeremiah, pain and hurt are a present reality, but God's salvation takes account of present conditions, and comes to us in that state.

Through Christ, God honours our vocation as human beings; through his self-giving on the cross, we can begin to learn how to be open to love and fullness of life.

Prayers of intercession

Loving God, we pray for your world in its turmoil and energy. We give thanks for human creativity and inventiveness, for works of imagination and skill, for scientific progress, with all the benefits that brings.

We pray for countries embroiled in violence and political conflict, for Yemen, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine, Syria, Myanmar.

We pray for all afflicted by strife fired by religious and sectarian intolerance, the desire to be right and to crush those who don't share the ideas of those in power.

We lay before you the power of greed to dominate world markets, and bring injustice to the poorest and those with no voice.

We bring in shame this country's part in global arms sales, which contributes to the death of many innocent people.

We pray for those who live in poverty in this country, and for all who seek to bring about change in the direction of greater justice.

We pray for the NHS, for staff under pressure, for all engaged in Covid strategy. We pray that the rich countries may be roused to provide adequate supplies of vaccine to those who need it globally.

We remember before God all those we know who are sick or sorrowing or anxious.

We offer all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Lord's Prayer

StF 346 /HP 455 Christ is the world's light

Blessing

As you continue on your way,
May you know that God goes before you.
By the strength of his Spirit,
Share your faith with the uncertain;
Share your love with the unlovely;
Share your presence with the lonely;
And share God with everyone,
Just as God has shared himself with you,
In the unfading blessing of Jesus Christ,
Our Lord and Saviour.

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