

SUNDAY, October 27, 2024 Healing and Made New

Psalm 34 761 VU Hebrews 7:23-29 Mark 10:46-52

October 31, 1517 Martin Luther a German priest, theologian, author, hymnwriter, professor, and Augustinian friar and was key figure of the Protestant Reformation whose influence has been widely regarded for Western and Christian history. Ordained to the priesthood in 1507, he came to reject several teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church particularly the view on indulgences. He objected to the teaching that those who sinned would receive forgiveness by performing specific actions like repeating specific prayers, pilgrimages, visiting particular places, or performing specific good works. Whereby Luther taught that salvation and eternal life are not earned by good deeds; rather, they are received only as the free gift of God's grace through the believer's faith in Jesus Christ, who is the sole redeemer from sin. Luther's theology also taught the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed knowledge, that all baptized Christians are leaders within the church. Luther attempted to resolve these differences amicably, but when he was not heard, he posted his 95 Theses on the doors of the church at Wittenberg on Oct 31, (All Hallows Evening) knowing that they would be seen by many who came to remember their loved ones on All Saints Day. Eventually Luther left the church, established the Lutheran church and thus begun the protestant movement. Other leaders of his time, Ulrich Zwingli, Philip Melancton, John Calvin lead to the development of new churches and ultimately to the Protestant churches still in existence today- including our UCC!

Why is this important? Because it explains why there are different ways of coming to the communion table, the different practises of Baptism and that these are the two sacraments of the reformed church. The church established by Jesus to welcome all who would believe and have faith in his teachings and to understand that his death on the cross was for all to be forgiven and to draw to closer to understanding who God is and can be.

These teachings are foundational to us as a church but also to people who want to learn more about Jesus and who he was. And who is Jesus? Jesus is the one that is the described in Hebrews 7 as "holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens. And the Son appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever."

But if we turn to the story of Bartimaeus in Mark10 we find ourselves near the city gate of Jericho. We don't know the time frame of this story. We read "They came to Jericho". And some time passes, for when Jesus is preparing to leave the city with his disciples and a large crowd

there is Bartimaeus. We don't know for how long he was sitting there. He might have been there when Jesus arrived and now that the crowd is getting larger, Jesus is getting ready to leave and so he knows that he has to be noticed. This blind beggar, the son of Timaeus hears that Jesus is coming by and getting ready to leave Jericho. Jesus is coming by. He is excited about this as he has heard about this man/ this teacher/ healer/ son of God and he wants to be noticed by Jesus. And so he began to shout and say "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Those in the crowd told him to be quiet. But he shouted more loudly, "Have mercy on me!" This time Jesus heard him and he stopped moving. He stood still.

He said, "Call him here." The crowd called the blind man and said "Take heart, get up, he is calling you." Jesus did not have to ask twice; Immediately, Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, sprang up and ran to the spot from where the voice of Jesus came. When Bartimaeus was in front of him, Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" What a question? What did Bartimaeus want/ need/ desire in that moment? What would make his life better? What would change his role/ position or lot in life?

Bartimaeus had been discerning this for a long time. What would he ask Jesus for? He knew about Jesus. He knew that Jesus was the Teacher for he says, "My teacher, let me see again." From this we know that he used to see and for some reason he lost his sight. Because he could no longer see, he could not work, he could not look after his family and he was left to beg in the street. He knew that what had changed was his inability to see in order to be a productive part of the community and family. Jesus just speaks to him. He knows Bartimaeus and sees that he has faith in Jesus. Jesus says, "Go, your faith has made you well." Go. Your faith has made you well. It cost nothing for Bartimaeus to see again. He believed in Jesus and immediately he regained his sight. Now what was he going to do? He followed Jesus out of the city. Where he went we do not know but he followed. He could see! His new life began.

Bartimaeus would now begin a new life filled with hope; no more begging in the street. He could see. But what was he going to do? He was unsure what but he knew he believed in Jesus who had healed him.

Bartimaeus was asked a simple question by Jesus, "What do you want me to do for you?" IN our Christian belief Jesus died for our sakes and rose to new life. But have we considered the question he asked Bartimaeus and truly understood its implications? Have you considered what Jesus can do for you or I or us as a church/ family in faith? How would you

respond to this? How do you understand Jesus as Saviour? Healer or teacher? Redeemer or One who forgives and makes new?

These questions have been asked by people just like you for over 2000 years- from the time Jesus rose to new life to now; we might wonder what did Jesus mean? What can I do for you? Or maybe we should be asking this question of ourselves what can I do for Jesus?

The message of Jesus is clear. He came out of love for us to save us from sin by dying and rising to new life. This new life is offered to us if we believe and trust in him, and do what he calls us to do- love others and tell others his story of unconditional love and hope. We learn this through the words and message of the Bible; of the teachings of Jesus, and the letters of Paul. And this is what led to Martin Luther's concerns for the ethical and theological reform of the church: Scripture alone is authoritative (*sola scriptura*) and justification is by faith (*sola fide*), not by works.

Jesus said to Bartimaeus- your faith has made you well. He didn't say pay me a few dollars and I'll heal you. He said your faith has made you well. And not only was Bartimaeus' sight restored, his whole life was made new- he could live and support himself, his family and be recognized as part of the community of believers. He followed Jesus in faith and lived.

As Christians we need to look to our history, to find out why we hold the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion regularly in celebration. To understand what having faith in Jesus and believing in his death and resurrection means for us as people who seek to know and received unconditional love. Our church history also calls us to look and read and understand what the Bible says about Jesus; God as Creator and the Spirit which continues to guide us.

And the question that Jesus asked Bartimaeus is still asked. How would you answer? What would you say to Jesus? What do you want Jesus to do for you? What else can Jesus do for you but offer the gift hope and promise of eternal life? He will not leave you in difficult times; he will not leave you in times of celebration, but we must realize that what we do after he heals/ forgives and shows us his love is up to us. Bartimaeus followed him. His faith had brought his healing and he followed the Healer.

Your faith has led you here this day. Your faith has enabled you to hear this message. Christ is the foundation of the church. The Bible is authoritative as we listen and learn about God Father, Son and Spirit and it is by faith and we are forgiven. Jesus is still asking the same question: What do you want Jesus to do for you?

Let us reflect on this and pray:

Jesus our Saviour and lord, we praise you for you are the one who heals, who offers us unconditional love and is the reason we can sing and shout and rejoice that we are redeemed and forgiven and loved forevermore.

Help us in these moments to answer that question you asked Bartimaeus: What do you want me to do for you- with hope with joy and excitement and with conviction. Enable us to grow in faith knowing that you see us as your faithful followers and that we can answer. To see you with new eyes to follow in hope and to come to you because you have broken every barrier down and we are yours. We come to you O God just as we are. Amen.