

Go! Your Faith Has Made You Well!

Grace, mercy and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Over the past few weeks, our gospel readings have been following Jesus' final journey as he makes his way to Jerusalem for Holy Week. As he travels, there are many "teaching moments" that he is able to use to expand further on several issues as they come up. The Pharisees challenge him about divorce, and Jesus demonstrates to them that marriage still is very good. A rich young man comes to him, wanting to know what else he must do to be saved. Jesus uses this to show just how impossible it is for man to earn his way to heaven, that the only way is through him and him alone. He even has to remind his disciples yet again that greatness in God's eyes is seen in humble service of others.

Finally, in our lesson for today, Jesus is nearing the end of his journey. On the way to Jerusalem, he passes through Jericho. Just a short time after this, he enters into Jerusalem in a most triumphant manner. But before he reaches his "final destination," he still wants to teach his followers about the relationship between suffering and faith. The miracle that Jesus performs helps us to see the blessings of suffering and leads us to rejoice in the healing of our Savior!

I. See the Blessings of Suffering

We read again a portion of our sermon text from Mark 10. **Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"** Totally blind, and completely dependent on the generosity of others, Bartimaeus was forced to beg on the side of the road leading away from Jerusalem. To him, this day may have felt like any other day. However, Bartimaeus hears something that tells him something is different. As he sits there, he hears a commotion, and is curious about what is going on. He asks those around him, and they tell him that Jesus of Nazareth is nearby.

Bartimaeus had been given a great burden in his life. He was not born blind, but at some point in his life, he had lost his sight. How cruel that must have been! He knew what he was missing out on. He had seen the beauty of God's creation for at least part of his life, but God had seen fit to take his sight away from him. How angry he could have been, and frustrated, knowing what was out there and yet being unable to see any of it. From his perspective there was no reason for any of his suffering.

But as the gospel lesson progresses, the purpose for Bartimaeus's blindness is made clear. He had lost his sight, so that in this moment he could cry out to Jesus for mercy. He was blind, so that Jesus could draw Bartimaeus to himself and work a miracle for him. Jesus' love and compassion shined in the face of this suffering. The faith that Bartimaeus had was on display for all as well. This had been a part of God's plan all along!

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to look at your own lives. Think about the times when God saw fit to allow suffering and loss to enter your own life. Whatever it was, you can look back at your life, or perhaps even now, and point to it and say, that right there was the worst experience of my life. That was where I hurt the most.

How do you deal with the pain? Where do you turn to when you bear this great and heavy burden of suffering? Instead of crying out for help, and seeking God's comfort and protection, do we sometimes turn it around on the only one who could deliver us from this pain. "What have I done to deserve this suffering? Was it something I did? Is this a punishment for my sins? Am I not believing in you hard enough? Why me, God? Why can't you pick on someone else for a change? I've already suffered enough!"

This kind of thinking is dangerous and can lead down a steep and dangerous slope. This questioning of God, and the anger that comes with it, covers up our eyes, and makes it so we cannot see. Blinded by the pain and suffering, we do not see that God is doing good with what he allows. Instead, we see nothing. Sometimes

it's difficult to resist responding to God's love with hatred and rage. How dare he make me suffer? This sinful pride, and blind rage leads to one final, awful destination. The unquenchable fires of hell.

However, just like with Bartimaeus, our suffering is not without a purpose. Jesus uses the same pain and suffering that we go through to lead us to him! He hears our cry, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," and he calls us to him. Through his grace and love, he opens our eyes and heals us of the sinful pride which had so badly blinded us. With our sight restored, Jesus gives us the faith to see that suffering is no curse, but in fact a great blessing. It is not a punishment for sin, but instead the means through which Jesus shows his love for us. Even in the worst of times, the most intense suffering, Jesus' love and comfort draw us nearer to him. This healing is something that we can rejoice in!

II. Rejoice in the Healing From Your Savior

As Bartimaeus hears that it is Jesus passing by, he gives us a beautiful example of faith crying out to Jesus in suffering. **Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.**

Jesus' response to Bartimaeus is remarkable. He simply says, "**Go...your faith has healed you.**" Jesus also says the same to you. He sees the faith in your heart, the faith that the Holy Spirit planted and nurtured through the Word. This faith is a gift of God. It trusts completely in him, and in times of suffering and hardship cries out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." It's amazing that Jesus says YOUR faith has healed you, since he really is the one who gave us that faith in the first place.

The impact that faith has in our lives is incredible. It heals the anger and doubt that pops up when we are faced with suffering. Through faith in Jesus, the very mindset that you approach this suffering with is changed. Jesus shows us that he does in fact **work all things for the good of those who love him**, and "all things" definitely includes the suffering we undergo.

When we are faced with this reality, that Jesus works all things for our good, what is the reaction to this? We can run to him with all of our needs, knowing that whatever it is he will work that out in a way that is best for all involved! Look at Bartimaeus. He believed in Jesus. His faith gave him to jump up and rush to Jesus. Jesus asked him what he wanted. Jesus knew full well what Bartimaeus would ask of him. He's God. He knew Bartimaeus's heart. But he still wanted Bartimaeus to come with his requests!

Jesus wants us to approach him with our needs and requests as well. We can come to Jesus in confidence, knowing that he wants us to come to him, and that he will not turn us away. In times of trouble, he hears your prayer, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me," and he has promised he will deliver you. But he also wants us to come in the good times as well. We can bring all of our requests to him, no matter how great or small they are.

Finally, the different perspectives about suffering can be startling. To someone who has no faith, or is completely blinded by their own anger, suffering looks like a punishment from God. "I must have done something wrong to deserve this pain." But when viewed through the lens of faith, suffering is a wonderful opportunity to ask the question, "How can I glorify my Savior? Who else is involved in my suffering that Jesus can bless as well?"

Jesus was on the most important road trip ever. He was on his way to die for the sins of the world. And yet, he still took the time to care for this man who needed his help. His healing of Blind Bartimaeus was one of the last healing miracles that he ever performed before he died for our sins. How fitting it was that he closed out his ministry with the opening of this man's eyes. However, this miracle was more than just healing from a physical malady. Consider the impact on everyone who was suffering of their own troubles. They could see Bartimaeus suffering, begging on the side of the road. How they could then rejoice after seeing these things! He alone could open our eyes to see that suffering is no curse, but in fact a blessing. We too can rejoice in the healing our Savior has granted us, confident in the knowledge that Jesus has saved us from eternal suffering. Jesus says to all of us as well, "Go! Your Faith Has Healed You!" Amen.