

Sermon – Hearing and Seeing
Sunday, October 25, 2015
Scripture – Job 42:1-6, 10-17, Mark 10:46-52
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Our first scripture reading is Job 42:1-6, 10-17. For the last four Sundays, our lectionary readings have been from the book of Job. We have journeyed with Job through horrific loss, misguided comfort from friends, theological debate, grandstanding, bantering and a life-changing encounter with Yahweh. Job's struggle is brought to a resolution in today's reading, one which will satisfy some and disappoint others.

The commentaries make two observations worth noting before our reading. First, the verb *ma'as* in verse six is translated by the NRSV Bible as *I despise myself*. Many commentaries agree a more helpful interpretation would be "*I yield myself*" in the presence of Yahweh. Self-loathing does not fit the context. Commentaries also remind us that "repent" does not always refer to being sorry for one's sin but has a wide range of meaning including to have pity, compassion or to comfort oneself. The second observation is a caution not to read the restored fortunes as reiterating the age-old wisdom Job rejects, namely, that the righteous are rewarded with prosperity and the wicked punished with suffering. (*Texts for Preaching, Year B, pg. 558*) Of note also are Job's daughters, who are named and who receive an inheritance; something unheard of in a patriarchal society. May God open our hearts and minds to the hearing and understanding of God's Word.

1 Then Job answered the Lord: **2** "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. **3** "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. **4** "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me." **5** I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; **6** therefore I yield myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

10 And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. **11** Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring. **12** The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; and he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand donkeys. **13** He also had seven sons and three daughters. **14** He named the first Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-happuch. **15** In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters; and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. **16** After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations. **17** And Job died, old and full of days.

Our second scripture reading is Mark 10:46-52. The healing of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, serves as the concluding bookend to a section of Mark's Gospel in which blindness is a unifying theme. The section begins in chapter eight with Jesus restoring sight to a blind man at Bethsaida. In chapters 9 and 10 Jesus confronts a different kind of blindness—a spiritual blindness among his closest followers, who seem either unwilling or unable to accept the radical claims of God's in-breaking kingdom that we are called to serve; and the suffering, rejection and death that will be a part of Christ's journey home. (*Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4 pg. 212*) The blind Barthimaeus' voice crying out for mercy surely hit a nerve of those who did not see Christ for who he was and what was about to happen right before their eyes. Hear now God's holy word.

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. **47** When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" **48** Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" **49** Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." **50** So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. **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.

The title of the sermon: Hearing and Seeing

The text: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;" Job 42:5

Let us pray: Holy and loving God, may we each know the joy and wonder of seeing you with our own eyes. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;*

With these words, British Nobel Laureate Rudyard Kipling begins his classic poem "If", written in 1895 and first published in 1910. The poem is written in the form of paternal advice to the poet's son, John. Joni Mitchell put the poem to music in her 2007 album *Shine*. I first came across "If" in the 90s during an annual Christmas Eve poetry reading at a parishioner's home while serving my first pastorate.

When I shared how touched I was by the poem with my mentor at the time, The Rev. Dr. Fred Cornell, he was delighted. "If" was a favorite poem of his mother's, who framed and hung it in his bedroom, greeting him each morning growing up. When Paul was born, Peter and I decided we wanted "If" to greet our son each morning and to continue the tradition we learned from the man who officiated at our wedding and for whom we had a great respect and admiration.

Dr. Cornell was a man, not unlike Job and Bartimaeus, who was acquainted with grief, who experienced loss, who persisted in integrity and who was an agent for change along the way. A demonstration of Fred's advocacy for justice was his participation in the 1965 Voting Rights March in Selma, Alabama. I will always be grateful for his advocacy as I sought my first call and for his progressive view of women in the ministry. One of the reasons we chose the name "Paul" for our son was to honor the memory of Fred and Audrey's son, Paul Cornell, who died tragically of a brain aneurism the summer following his graduation from law school. Ironically, our son Paul has decided to pursue a career in law.

There is something within the character of Job and Bartimaeus that resonates with Kipling's poem "If". Both are resolute and persistent with voices that cry out, even when others seek to blame them and quiet them. The voices of others cannot mute their cry to be acknowledged by the Creator and Savior even in the midst of their suffering. Both are rewarded for their persistence with "eyes that see God."

How delightful to be introduced to Bartimaeus in today's reading, whose name means "Son of Honor." What a comfort to discover in his story parallels with our friend Job. Bartimaeus refuses to be defined by his circumstances or by the expectations of those who are able to see, who appear to be close to Jesus, and who even presume the right to speak on Jesus' behalf. Rather than trust others, Bartimaeus trusts himself and persists until his call is heard by Christ.

According to Dr. Lincoln Galloway, Professor of Homiletics at the Claremont School of Theology:

The persistence of Bartimaeus sets in motion a wave of mercy, blessing and change. Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus calls for Bartimaeus. Those around Jesus call Bartimaeus to Jesus. The breakthrough of mercy begins with the recognition that those who once enjoined Bartimaeus not to bother Jesus of Nazareth are now transformed. They are no longer speaking sternly to him. Indeed, their excitement is palpable: Take heart! Cheer up! Get up! On your feet! Jesus is calling you! They have become witnesses to and vessels of mercy.

This story of mercy put into motion by the persistence of one person's refusal to accept the status quo of those who presume to speak on behalf of God we also see in Job's story. In the midst of his struggle, Job holds fast to God and clings to his dignity as a human being, maintaining his integrity, and setting it without qualification before God. It is not the dialogue with Yahweh which changes Job. It is the wonder, the awe and the sense of gratitude being in the presence of Yahweh that transforms him. *I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.*

In the past, Job knew God from the instructions of others, from his family and from his faith community. Now Job meets God in his own life, in the thick of the storm that is his life. Instead of being forced into submission, Job speaks of firsthand experience, a personal meeting, a kind of seeing that surpasses known speech about God. Face to face with his loving Creator, Job yields himself and finds comfort in the dust and ashes of his humanity. Job gets up from his ash heap of loss and sorrow to get on with his life. His deepened experience of God summons him to new ways of seeing, leads him outside of himself, and creates of him a new being in the midst of his community; a community which no longer judges him or tells him to be quiet, but a community that eats bread with him; shows him sympathy and comfort and takes an offering on his behalf. It seems that not only Job is transformed. The community is also changed by what they learned about Yahweh because of Job's persistence. (*Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4, pg.196*)

The most astounding part of the closing passage of Job's epic story is not that he had more children. (Of course, these could never replace the children he lost.) The most astounding part is Job names his daughters to an inheritance that the culture would unjustly deny them. Job's own experience of transformation and restoration empowers him to be an agent for change.

As we celebrate Reformation and Stewardship Dedication Sunday, we are grateful for the generations who have come before us, who, like Job and Bartimaeus, persisted in seeing God. Because of their willingness to be transformed and to become agents for change, we rejoice in being a part of a church that is reformed and always reforming.

May God grant each of us the resilience and inner-strength of Bartimaeus and Job. As we continue on the way, may we *not look too good nor talk too wise*. Rather may we walk with reverence for life and gratitude for the grace and mercy we have received at the hand of God. May we give generously to this faith community and may our persistence be rewarded with eyes that see God as we greet our sure Redeemer. Amen.