

Bartimaeus by Reverend Craig Lindsey – Palm Sunday April 5, 2020

We each begin the story of Resurrection at different places, some at Christmas, others Jesus' Baptism, some with Lazarus, most at Palm Sunday, personally, I like to begin in the chapter before, at verse 17: For what is the Crucifixion and Resurrection about but "A Man going on a Journey" and "Eternal Life?"

The whole of the Bible, all of human history and culture have been about this quest for The Good Life. What must we do to be satisfied, to be happy, win the brass ring, to be successful, to find eternal peace? If we survive COVID-19 will we be happy, or feel saved, or only go back to routine?

There is foreshadowing that Jesus' answer is not going to go well for this man, when Jesus rebuffs him. But still Jesus reminds him of Moses' Commandments.

Intriguing, that according to Mark's Gospel, the answer is not in what we believe about God, but in how we live our lives: avoiding murder, adultery, theft, lying, fraud, and Honoring your parents.

Nothing about false idols, the Sabbath, God's name... And Jesus loves him because he has practiced these throughout his life... That could have been the end of the story: "Well done good & faithful servant, you have done well with a little enter the joy of your master!" But instead this sets up a Counter-point, Jesus tells him "There is one thing still in your way, sell all you have, give to the poor and follow me." Instead of being self-satisfied, the man went away sorrowful.

Jesus responded, "How hard it will be for those who have great riches. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." This is one of those pithy hard sayings from Jesus that are often repeated, and troubling to think about, especially difficult because it is in each of the Gospels. Some have responded as the Disciples did: "Then who can get in?" To which he replies "With people it is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Others who have visited the Walled City of Jerusalem have said, this is archaeological! While the main Gates to the City are like the 4 compass points, wide enough for trucks or armies to march through, there was a secret passage called The Eye of the Needle, so narrow only a person could shimmy through, and that, only if you did not have great wealth or girth.

Some have suggested linguistics, that the Aramaic word for Camel (Camalus) was mistaken for the word (Cammelis) meaning Rope, while still improbable the threads of a rope taken apart could still pass.

As one who enjoys Needlework, I have a different interpretation, that if you try to force anything through a Needle's eye, even a thread, is too big. But with perspective, taking a step back, all things are possible.

Taking a step back, to gain perspective, (Verse 46-56) This story is not in the other Gospels. On the way to Jerusalem, they came to Jericho, and as they were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus was on the side of the road. Why is this here in Mark?

Jericho was located on the Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth, 750 feet below Sea level, let alone Jerusalem. And Jesus having come from Nazareth in Galilee, going down, down, down, on his journey; at this moment, Jesus begins the journey up to Jerusalem, so meeting Bartimaeus is a turning point. In all of literature, there is not another Bartimaeus. However, he is identified as a Blind Beggar, the son of Timaeus, and in Ancient Greek Literature, which would have been known and studied at the time of Jesus in Nazareth, in Plato's The Cave. How odd? Plato's The Cave is one of the great pieces of Philosophy, describing that there are theoretical ideals and practical realities. Inside the cave, we may describe a Chair, and in our mind's eye, we can envision a theoretical chair, completely agreeing what

this is about. However, out in the world, we each will create and use a plethora of differing kinds of chairs. Timaeus, according to Plato, is one of four friends discussing perfection, one in Music and Art, one in Law, one in religion, and one in Geometry and Philosophy = Timaeus. To the Greek, Philosophy and Geometry were the most pure forms of thought, so the closest to absolute perfection.

Going back to the earlier story, what was the name of the man who came up to Jesus asking about Eternal Life? He has no name. According to Matthew and Luke, different from Mark, this man was Rich and Young, therefore highly educated. What if, the man who came to Jesus asking about Eternal Life, about the key to happiness and perfection, what if that man was the man identified here as BarTimaeus, a son of Timaeus. Even that may not have been his name, because as a student of Philosophy and Geometric Perfection, he would have been a "Son of Perfection." AND yet, in Aramaic, there is yet another twist, because the name Timaeus literally means Bankrupt, Poverty. The point being: All Philosophical and Geometric Perfection is Bunkrupt! Just as Jesus had said to the man, there is ONE THING MORE GO SELL ALL YOU HAVE TO GIVE TO THE POOR AND COME FOLLOW ME.

What if, this man who possessed EVERYTHING the world desires, Rich, Young, Powerful, Educated, Perfection in Thought, realized after he went away that Jesus was right! He went and sold all that he had, and now sits on the street corner of the lowest place on earth, recognizing his blindness & poverty.

When he heard it was Jesus, he called out "JESUS, SON OF DAVID, HAVE MERCY ON ME!" The Gospel of Mark says everyone tried to rebuke him, but he cried out all the more. But, and here is the best part, in Hebrew, the word "Hosanna" means "Son of David, Have Mercy on Me!" So the cry of Bartimaeus, becomes the cry of everyone.

Now there is more to the entry of Palm Sunday, because the City of Jerusalem as rebuilt by Herod, not only had the series of concentric walls from the time of the Jebusites, but four immense gates facing the four directions. One of these from the North was walled up to control the people. From the West, entered Pontius Pilate the new Prefect sent from Rome. He had chosen this morning, to march through the City Streets riding in his armor astride a magnificent White Stallion, with 400 Centurion, 4,000 foot soldiers, as a symbol of his power, derived from the Power of Rome.

Simultaneously, Jesus came into the City from the East, astride a Donkey, with foal, according to the Prophets a symbol of Peace and Righteousness. And with Jesus came his disciples and 200,000 followers singing Hosanna. These two forces entering from opposite sides.

There is only one other Gate, and that leads to Golgotha. The place of crucifixion.