

“Body, Mind, & Spirit”

February 13th, 2013, Ash Wednesday

Isaiah 61

Mark 10:46-52

Jesus asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man answered, “Master, I want to see!”

Mark 10:51

Let us pray... O God,

We pray for a cure – from the aches and pains, itches and spasms,
fears and tears, disappointments and despair.

We hope for a cure, but we will settle for a healing.

Amen

Ash Wednesday is traditionally observed as a Roman Catholic service
during which believers are marked with ashes

to make a cross on their forehead as a visible sign of being a Christian.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season of Lent

and is a time for reflection on one’s sins and a commitment to repent
or turn from them.

Since I served as an associate pastor at my first church in Connecticut,
I have always done a healing service on Ash Wednesday.

This has seemed to me to be a logical progression from repentance –

a desire to turn from that which is harmful to turn towards a commitment
to be more healthy.

Jesus helped people – free of charge for all we know,

in order to heal them from dis-eases of body, mind, and spirit.

He treated not only the symptoms of physical ailments,

but also the inward pain of broken hearts, mental illness,
and wounded spirits.

Each of us is complex and the challenges we face in life
affect us all in different ways.

Injury or illness affects the physical part of us, limiting our ability
to come and go as we please.

It can be very humiliating,

especially after once having enjoyed good health and strength in our youth.

A mind can be broken like an arm or leg.

Memory, passions, addictions, are all subject to afflictions of the mind.

Self concept and self worth can be diminished by the trials of life –

grief and shame, touching that spiritual part of we may call our heart or soul.

Our first lesson this evening is from Isaiah 61

and the first two verses were quoted by Jesus when he preached in Nazareth,
setting forth his mission in the world.

Willard, p.2

The help of the Holy Spirit – the Life breath of Holiness, is acknowledged
in preaching good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for captive people
and the recovery of insight to proud, blind people,
to heal and forgive and proclaim reconciliation between God and humanity.
These ancient words have served as a reminder through the ages
that God is always there for us.

Jesus quoted these words at the beginning of his ministry –
while the story of blind Bar-Timaeus takes place towards the end
of Jesus' journey to his destiny in Jerusalem.

He is on his way to Jerusalem by way of Jericho –
significant as a route taken by invading armies;
And Jesus was likewise on a path to confront the worldly powers.

Outside of Jericho, a man is sitting by the roadside –
his only possession is a blanket to protect himself from the elements.

Bar-timaeus' name means 'the son of honor' – Bar-Timaeus,
and the symbolism of his name suggests he had been
a person of influence and power – a man of honor.

But he had been brought low by his infirmity.

Bartimaeus for us in this story represents both, a blind person reduced to begging
and a proud person who has no insight to his arrogance.

When he hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, he cries out,
'Have mercy on me, son of David!'

David was the great king of Israel's golden years as a nation long ago;
But by Jesus' day, Israel was an occupied land of the Roman Empire.

So, Bartimaeus' words were a political statement that could've been taken
as a lament for wounded national pride –
as well as a provocation to the authorities.

The crowd tried to hush him up, but he cried out again, 'Son of David, help me';
And Jesus stopped to help him.

The people in the crowd tell Bartimaeus to be encouraged and get up;
So, he throws away his most important possession,
the flimsy shelter of a blanket,
and stands up to present himself to Jesus.

Jesus asks him,
'What do you want me to do for you?'

By saying this, Jesus is like good doctors who involve their patients
in their own healing.

By asking such a question, he helps the patient form a vision
for what improved good health would look like.

Willard, p.3

This man humbly asks for his eyesight back,
and Jesus responds by telling him to get going –
‘Go on your way, your faith has made you well.’
Jesus gives him respect as a responsible adult who has choices,
showing him that he still has options.
And Jesus heals this person’s spirit, his broken-heart,
as well as curing him of his physical blindness.
Jesus has given him the freedom to go where he chooses
and so, this person, who can now see, follows Jesus on ‘the Way’ –
the way of life of humility, peace, wholeness, and good health.

Jesus says to us still, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’
What is your blindness? What is your woundedness?
What paralyzes you? What frightens you?
In what ways are you a captive that keeps you from living life fully?

Shortly, you will be invited to come forward and receive an anointing
for healing – a blessing for yourself or for someone else,
as a tangible reminder that God is an abiding presence in your life,
no matter what.

For concerns that may be more of a more confidential nature,
you may wish to speak to me privately here at the church, at another time.

First, we will have a corporate prayer of confession, silent prayer,
and affirmation of forgiveness and blessing.
This will be followed by lifting up prayers of joy & concern as a community
and a reading of our prayer list.

Then, those of you who wish to come forward may do so.
We will conclude this evening’s devotions with the Lord’s Prayer,
the Gloria, and Passing of the Peace.

Let us now, come before our God to confess our sins and profess our faith
that God is like the trusted friend who holds us to be true
to ourselves and one another...

Isaiah 61

1 The Spirit of the Lord God

has taken control of me!

The Lord has chosen and sent me

to tell the oppressed the good news,

to heal the brokenhearted, and

to announce freedom for prisoners and captives.

2 This is the year when the Lord God will

show kindness to us and punish our enemies.

The Lord has sent me to comfort those who mourn,

3 especially in Jerusalem.

He sent me to give them flowers in place of their sorrow,

olive oil in place of tears,

and joyous praise in place of broken hearts.

They will be called "Trees of Justice,"

planted by the Lord to honor his name.

4 Then they will rebuild cities

that have been in ruins for many generations.

5 They will hire foreigners

to take care of their sheep and their vineyards.

6 But they themselves will be priests

and servants of the Lord our God.

The treasures of the nations will belong to them,

and they will be famous.

7 They were terribly insulted and horribly mistreated;

now they will be greatly blessed and joyful forever.

8 I, the Lord, love justice!

But I hate robbery and injustice.

My people, I solemnly promise to reward you

with an eternal agreement.

9 Your descendants will be known

in every nation.

All who see them will realize

that they have been blessed, by me, the Lord.

10 I celebrate and shout because of my Lord God.

His saving power and justice are the very clothes I wear.

They are more beautiful than the jewelry

worn by a bride or a groom.

11 The Lord will bring about justice and praise

in every nation on earth, like flowers blooming in a garden.

Mark 10:46-52

46 Jesus and his disciples
went to Jericho.

And as they were leaving,
they were followed by a large crowd.

A blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus son of Timaeus
was sitting beside the road.

47 When he heard that it was Jesus from Nazareth, he shouted,
“Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!”

48 Many people told the man to stop, but he shouted even louder,
“Son of David, have pity on me!”

49 Jesus stopped and said,
“Call him over!”

They called out to the blind man and said,
“Don’t be afraid! Come on! He is calling for you.”

50 The man threw off his coat as he jumped up
and ran to Jesus.

51 Jesus asked,
“What do you want me to do for you?”

The blind man answered,
“Master, I want to see!”

52 Jesus told him,
“You may go. Your eyes are healed because of your faith.”

Right away the man could see,
and he went down the road with Jesus.