

23 Pentecost B, Proper 25. October 28, 2018. Mark 10:46-52.

Our deacon, Sue Youngblood, is praying with our siblings in the synagogue at Oak Park Temple this morning. On the day after a white supremacist terrorist murdered at least eleven worshipers at a synagogue in Pennsylvania, she is there to show solidarity, support, and love. We preachers tend to think that our sermons after these terrorist attacks are very important. And many of the rest of us feel compelled to find exactly the right thing to say on social media. What we say is of course very important, *and* what we do is even more important. We are finishing our reading of the book of Job this morning. Job is a fairy tale, in which God makes a bet with the enemy that a good guy named Job will stay faithful no matter what. So the enemy goes and tortures him and destroys his property and kills his family. After all this torture, Job's friends come and sit on the ash heap with him. And they sit in silent solidarity for seven days, with no one saying a word.

They should have stopped there, because then they talk for forty chapters, trying to make sense of what happened, and they most certainly get it wrong. Eventually God shows up and yells at everybody and honestly it's beautiful but not particularly edifying. Sue today on behalf of all of us is doing the part that Job's friends got right. She is just going to be there, to show our friends that we love them, and we see their pain, and we are committed to standing with them even if that means death. What we say is important, and what we do is even more important.

There will be other things for us to do, as there has been for some time. We are not new to horror. We are not new to the claims of responsibility that horror lays on us. We are not new to the feeling of helplessness that comes with that responsibility—the sickening surety that what we must do is beyond us. But it is still what we must do. We must still join in God's work of lovingly mending the world, of making it whole, of reconciling the world to God while it tries its hardest to damn itself.

It is of course a problem that we ourselves are not whole. But this is where the story of Bartimaeus gives me hope. I have come to see Bartimaeus as a prototype for discipleship. He is blind and a beggar, below the lowest rung of the social ladder of his society. When Jesus comes by, he doesn't lead with a C.V. of how wonderful he is. He leads with his need: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" In the terms of his culture, this guy has nothing to recommend him, and he doesn't pretend that he has more than need. He persists when the crowd tries to shut him up, and when Jesus invites him he springs up and runs. He comes, throwing off even his cloak, bearing nothing but his brokenness, wounds, and hope.

Now, here's what I really want you to notice. Yes, Jesus heals him. But in every other instance in Mark, Jesus heals someone and then sends them away with instructions to stay silent. Only Bartimaeus instantly becomes a follower, joining in along the way of the messiah. And it matters very much where that way is leading, where Bartimaeus is following Jesus to. This miracle happens along the way to Jerusalem. Jesus and what is

now a large crowd are on their way to Jerusalem for what they all know will be the climax of this curious adventure that has called them away from their jobs and families. They know that they are walking into a fight, and Jesus has been telling them that he's not going to hit back. Jericho is the last stop before the Jerusalem suburbs—think Gary, Indiana—and the very next thing that happens in Mark is Palm Sunday.

Bartimaeus becomes a follower of Jesus, and that means that he is following him into a confrontation with the religious and political leaders of occupied Jerusalem. To become a follower of Jesus necessarily entails travelling the path that confronts and through love defeats the forces of the empire of death. Bartimaeus comes saying “help me,” an honest cry from a place of brokenness. He refuses to be silenced, even though his need is inconvenient to the crowd that would be content to walk right by it. When Jesus invites him, he leaps up leaving everything for the hope that Jesus brings. And when his need is met, he doesn't just dance away. He recognizes that his healing has brought him into a very particular community—a community that follows the man who calls beggars and children to him, heals the sick, and confronts the unjust rulers of the age.

We, I think and hope, are the same. Or we can be. We come here with needs and brokenness, with helplessness and guilt and fear. We come to be made whole. And when we are made whole through the slow miracles grace works through community and sacraments and worship, we find that we are already some way down the path of Jesus. We are already on the way that leads to mercy for beggars, kindness for children, and justice for the oppressed. We are already on the way that confronts death with resurrection and hatred with love. Wholeness in fact is best found on that path and even in that work. We are healed, so that we can join God's healing work in the world.

There's a great deal of wisdom in the first response of Job's friends, and in Sue's silent presence among the worshippers at Oak Park Temple today. There is also more work that we must do. We, shattered and fearful and angry and just a mess ourselves. We all know by now that we are not in control, that our willpower is not sufficient to fix this weeping world. But we do not despair. Because the path where healing for our brokenness lies is the same path that leads to the work this world most needs. We bring our need, and God uses it to mend the world. Amen.