

So, here we have the third and final time in which Jesus tells his disciples what awaits ~~them~~ **him** as they make their way to Jerusalem. You would think by the third time, and with all that Jesus has taught them up to this point, that the seriousness of this journey would have sunk in. But apparently it hasn't quite.

For, after this quite sobering declaration, two of his disciples make an interesting request; they ask for a place of honor next to Jesus, in what they call "his glory." It's really hard to know what they thought that meant - one can only imagine it was a place of power and majesty...whether of this life or eternity it is hard to know. Did they do this off to the side...on the down low...hoping for a position of privilege...kind of under their breath...wink, wink, nudge, nudge? That's what I imagine.

There's no indication of how Jesus received the request. Was he bemused? Did he absorb it matter-of-factly? Or, with frustration? We don't really get a feeling for it. But his response certainly bears some weight behind it, and was meant to make them think a bit more seriously about their request. He asks them if they are able to drink the cup he will drink, to live into the baptism into which he was baptized? They proclaim that they are. Okay, he says, then my cup and my baptism are yours. And, checking them with humility, he adds that allowing them to sit next to him in glory is not his to give. Siblings in Christ, hear the message, our Savior was never about the glory. Always humble...always understanding that his actions were going to rub the

powers-that-be the wrong way...and that his “cup” and his “baptism” were difficult and dangerous. If James and John felt capable of handling that, then, great! But he wanted them to know that there was nothing glamorous about “the Way.”

After the other Ten get word of James’ and John’s request....

Hold on, let me pause there and say a little bit about what happens when people try to make deals in the shadows. Eventually, it is going to come to light. James and John thought they could keep their request with Jesus quiet. Jesus would have none of it! After Jesus tells John and James what he expects of them, and what is not his to give, verse 41 tells us that the ten disciples heard what Jesus spoke to the two, and were not happy with it. I imagine the Brothers Zebedee were none too happy that Jesus outed them, but he simply makes it clear that privilege will not be a currency in God’s economy.

As he had said earlier to Peter in a different context, James and John were “setting their minds not on divine things but on human things.” In fact, you may say that while their eyes were set on human accomplishment, their hearts were blind to who God truly called them to be. Jesus reminds them that if they want to truly follow him, they are called “not to be served, but to serve, and to give his (their) life a *ransom* for many.” In looking up the root of the word “ransom,” I discovered it to mean, “to liberate many from misery.” Hear, again, siblings in Christ, Jesus was never about the glory, and he was never in it for himself. His call to his disciples is all about using whatever currency they

have-- power, privilege, personality, and mostly, FAITH--to work with others on obtaining their freedom, from whatever was keeping them down.

Enter a man named BarTimaeus - called, the “blind beggar.” The explanation for his name is a bit redundant - the son of Timaetus. For in Aramaic “bar” means “son,” and obviously Timaetus is his father’s name. Ah, but nothing is THAT simple in the gospels. Because you know I looked up the derivation of “Timaetus.” It means, “ethically and religiously unclean, impure.” The belief at that time was that blindness, or deafness, was brought on by the sins of the person, or the persons’ parents. (In John 9, Jesus is brought to trial after he heals a blind man.) Bartimaetus would have been thought as ritually unclean...not worth redeeming...left to solely make a living on begging and asking the support of others.

Yet, it is clear that he has more to contribute to the community, and so when he hears that Jesus is near he calls out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” He is roundly and vehemently shushed - another example of others trying to keep him from having agency over his own life. He won’t have it! Bartimaetus repeats ***his statement of faith***: “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Oh sisters and brothers, listen to what happened next - Jesus took notice. He stopped. He turned, and he summoned Bartimaetus to him. Brothers and sisters, Mark is reminding us that when we are at our wit’s end, when we call out to Jesus, Jesus responds. But note...NOTE what gave Bartimaetus the courage and assurance to go to Jesus. It was his community. It was his people.

They encouraged him...they shared in his joy...they bid him to “get up, for Jesus is calling **YOU!**”

And he wasted no time! He had nothing to lose...so, of course, he JUMPED UP and RAN to Jesus! And notice what happened next. Remember earlier in the story, two of Jesus’ disciples privately pulled Jesus aside and asked for a special favor....to sit in his glory. Bartimaeus’ experience is the opposite - there in front of a whole crowd, he asks to be set free: “My teacher, let me see again.” And to put an exclamation point on all of his teachings to his disciples over the past series, Jesus says “Go, for **your faith** has made you well.” Immediately the blind man could see, and immediately “the son of impurity” was made whole, and joined the Way of Jesus.

In our Lenten series, we are examining a group of what’s called, Marks of Vitality. Our denomination has named seven expressions of faith that are consistent among churches that exhibit abundant life. The mark we discussed this past Wednesday is Lifelong Discipleship Formation. Basically stated, Lifelong Discipleship Formation means that “from the cradle to the grave (we seek) to be formed for right living with God and with all people. ...(It is) discipleship formed and strengthened in the community of Christ, and permeates daily practices and daily living.”

(https://www.presbyterianmission.org/wp-content/uploads/TFE_Complete-Manual-Vital-Congregations.pdf, p.2-1)

If we but offer the Prayer of Bartimaeus every day, we will be well on our way to cradle-to-grave discipleship formation: “Son of David, have mercy on me. Teacher, let me see again.”

There is so much in this life that influences the way we “see” the world; the way that we see one another; the way that we see ourselves. Quite often our vision gets skewed - breaches in our relationships are ripped open.

Throughout the season of Lent, we will be learning about the agencies of the Presbyterian Church (USA) that help repair the breach caused by brokenness in the world.

The three programs supported by One Great Hour of Sharing - Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Presbyterian Hunger Program, and Self-Development of People - all work in different ways to serve individuals and communities in need. From initial disaster response to ongoing community development, their work fits together to provide people with safety, sustenance, and hope.

[\(https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/offering/oghs/\)](https://specialofferings.pcusa.org/offering/oghs/)

This past week, I had the opportunity to attend the NEXT Church conference in Cincinnati.

NEXT Church seeks to follow God by strengthening the relational fabric of the Presbyterian Church (USA). We do this by cultivating congregations and leaders who work in sustained, effective, and faithful ways to

promote God's transformation of our communities for the common good.

(<https://nextchurch.net/mission-and-vision/>)

And indeed many connections were made - I suspect you'll hear more out of me based on my experience. One opportunity I had was to watch the premier of the film *Flint: The Poisoning of an American City*. The film chronicles the history of Flint, Michigan, as it boomed and busted with the rise and fall of the auto industry, and the perfect storm of events that lead to the ongoing saga of its water pollution. Talk about opening one's eyes to myriad issues. I had just assumed that the city of Flint was past its water issues. I had just assumed that once the word got out about its plight the "powers that be" would have done what was necessary to stop the poisoning of the city's water sources. But it is not the case...the issues continue.

Flint: The Poisoning of an American City is one of five films that have been produced by Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. PDA's call is, to quote an earlier part of the text, to use their (our) resources as a **ransom** for many; ie. to liberate many from misery. We were able to talk with the director of the films, a Presbyterian, David Barnhardt. He says in each of their films they seek to shine a light on issues of brokenness - there are no political leanings made, just the opportunity for people to **see** what is often obscured or hidden. When we see, we are more apt to move and want to do something about it.

This is one of the things Presbyterian Disaster Assistance does so well - it mobilizes people in the face of disaster, whether human-caused, or by an act of nature. Tuesday, when we were talking about the film, was the day after the

devastating tornado ripped through the Nashville area. The director of PDA says that they were already in contact with the appropriate agencies to get feet on the ground to help with clean-up and rebuilding. One of PDA's strengths is its ability to be present for the long-haul. As long as people are willing to serve PDA will stay engaged. In fact, if any of you are looking to do a service project, PDA is ready and willing to slot you into place. In just a quick glance at their [volunteer work team sites](#), there must be 30 of them. From ministries at the southern border, to continued rebuilds from Hurricanes Irma, Michael, and Harvey, to the flood damage in the midwest, to helping out in Flint. The list is long - to quote the friends of Bartimeaus, "Get up, Jesus is calling!" If joining a work team isn't in our capacity, then let us be about financially supporting the important work of this incredible organization within our denomination.

Thanks be to God, Amen.