

Sunday Sermon
October 28, 2018
Mark 10:46-52
“Give Everything But Up”

Introduction

Our oldest son, Will, lives in Rock Hill, SC, in a group home for men with developmental disabilities. Will has a disorder called Tuberous Sclerosis Complex. It is an uncommon disease. You do not often see Tuberous Sclerosis telethons, billboards, t-shirts, wristbands.

In fact, I have an old poster from the national organization that says:

“We thought we would teach our children about the world.

Now we find ourselves teaching the world about our children.”

But I admit that when Will aged out of special education and moved into a group home, I moved on too. I quit trying to teach the world. I quit keeping up with the research and the advocacy. Tuberous Sclerosis is a complex disorder caused by mutations in two different genes on two different chromosomes. There is no preventive treatment. I figured what’s the use? Will, has disabilities; always will. Will is who he is. “It is what it is.”

Then the annual donation request came from the national organization. It included the usual cover letter with the usual picture and story from a family affected by the disease. I read the story, about their shock and grief with the diagnosis, about their concern for the future of their child. And then I saw across the bottom of the letter the statement: “We’ll give everything, but up.”

“We’ll give everything, but up.” What an amazingly defiant response to “It is what it is.”

I

Rev. Susan Andrews points out that our gospel story today begins in disability. And for the individual it begins with emptiness, futility, and hopelessness. And as such, this son of honor, which is what the name Bartimaeus means, offers us a lesson in defiance. And through the defiance, a portrait of faith.

This is what faith looks like. Faith is defiant. Faith is giving everything but up. And faith is seeing God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves and then we out of gratitude doing for God what only we can do.

Jesus and his disciples are traveling on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. There are others most likely also making the same journey, on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Sitting at the city gate collecting pennies in his cloak is Bartimaeus, a man who is blind. As Jesus passes, Bartimaeus calls out, “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!” The man is blind, yet he has vision clearer than most of the disciples. “Son of David” is a messianic title. Bartimaeus knows who Jesus is.

The people around Bartimaeus try to quiet him. But he will not give up and

cries out even louder. And to the crowd's astonishment, Jesus stops and says, "Call him here."

"Take heart, get up; he is calling you," the crowd says to Bartimaeus. And then there is an interesting little verse here, "So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus." Now you may not think that is significant, but in that day a poor man's cloak was his shelter; it was his tent. In fact, a cloak was such a valuable possession that Old Testament law specified that one could take a man's cloak from him as collateral against a loan only under the condition that the lender returned it to him in the evening, so that the borrower could have it for the night. Likely, this cloak was all the housing that Bartimaeus had.

In that moment, by that simple act of throwing off his cloak, Bartimaeus does the one thing the wealthy man would not do when he asked Jesus earlier how he might win eternal life. Bartimaeus leaves all he has and follows Jesus.

II

Jesus then asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus, in dust and darkness, says, "My teacher, let me see again."

There is a genus of fish called Anableps. That is a Greek word, meaning "to see again" or "to see above." The fish have two sets of eyes, one pair for underwater vision and a second pair used when they surface.

Anableps is the word used here by Bartimaeus. "Teacher, let me anableps; let me see again." Does that mean that Bartimaeus once had vision and lost it? We do not know. What we do know is Bartimaeus has a vision of faith that allows him to recognize Jesus as Messiah. And that ability to see above the world gains him the ability to see again in the world.

Jesus asks of us the same question, "What do you want me to do for you?" And in that question, we are forced to decide what is really important in our lives. When Bartimaeus says "I want anableps," he is not just saying I want my sight back. He is saying I want to see anew, to see above, meaning I want to see the world as you see it.

It has been a week of hate-filled acts. We ask what does it mean for us to see this world as Jesus sees it? It means to see the hate crimes, the evil abuses, the greedy, self-serving injustices, the prejudices, the discriminations and say defiantly as the church of Jesus Christ we choose love, we choose peace, we choose to rise above and seek the good.

III

Today on the church calendar is Reformation Sunday, a day of asking, like the reformers did in the 16th century, how we are doing as Christ's church in the world? Is the church of Jesus Christ in decline in the world? Or is just the way we have been doing church that is in decline?

It is easy to become discouraged. But God is still sovereign, the risen Christ is

still living, and Holy Spirit is still making things new. And believers are still being called to be reformers, to look above and see the hope of resurrection, to look below and see new things in new ways, and to stand up, throw off our cloaks, whatever inhibits us, doubts, possessions, traditions, prejudices, and follow Christ and be Christ's church in the world.

Conclusion

"Why do you tithe to the church?" a leader asked a church group. Some people cited the inherent need to be generous. Others said that they contributed money to the work of the church out of a sense of gratitude for all the good gifts God has given them.

But then one young businessman said, "I give out of defiance."

"Defiance?" the leader asked.

"Yes. When the plate is passed and I put my money in, it is my little act of defiance. I put in sixty to seventy hours a week in my business. Most of my life is consumed with making my business work and getting money for my family and me.

So, when I contribute, it is my clinch-fisted way of saying, 'You do not have all of me yet. There is still ten percent of me that belongs to God rather than the world. Ten percent; it is not a lot, half of what we are expected to tip these days. And I refuse to let the world have it.'"

Church changing and life changing reformation begins in defiance.

Bartimaeus defiantly refused to give up. He refused to accept things the way they were and called out for mercy, and he received new vision and new life.

That is our calling.

"It is what it is?" Not if we choose to give everything, but up.

May that be our commitment in this stewardship season—

And in all the seasons of our lives. Amen.