

22d Sunday after Pentecost 24 October 2021

Jeremiah 31:7-9 / Psalm 126 / Hebrews 7:23-28 / Mark 10:46-52

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

I have a question for you: Have any of you been around a baby lately? Is there a baby in your family? Or do you remember when you were a baby? (Cradle holding a baby) One thing I know about babies, they're not shy when it comes to letting us know when they want something. They'll let you know when they're hungry, or sleepy, or they need a diaper change. Since little babies don't know how to talk, how can they tell us what they need?

Babies let us know what they need by crying. Babies don't care if you're in church, at a friend's house, or eating dinner in a fancy restaurant; if they need something, they'll tell you. Then as we get older, we learn to be a little more quiet and polite about making our wants and wishes known. Maybe we do...

Today we heard a story about someone who wasn't scared to let Jesus know they needed something. As Jesus and his followers were leaving a town called Jericho, there was a blind man named Bartimaeus sitting by the road. When he heard Jesus was approaching, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, help me!"

The people around him were disturbed and said, "Be quiet!" But he only shouted louder. When Jesus heard Bartimaeus crying out, he stopped and said, "Tell him to come to me." Bartimaeus jumped up, threw aside his coat, and went to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked. "I want to see again," Bartimaeus answered.

And Jesus said, "Go. You are healed because you believed." Instantly, Bartimaeus could see and he followed Jesus down the road.

Just like our parents do whatever they can to find out what a little baby wants or needs, God knows we have needs, and God wants what's best for us. (Cradle the baby doll.) The Bible says, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done." (Philippians 4:6)

So when you have a need in your life, don't be shy. Speak up! Let's remember that Jesus wants us to come to Him.

Let's pray together: Heavenly Father, we know that you love your children and want what's best for them. Help us remember we don't have to worry about anything. All we need to do is to speak up, and ask you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Did you enjoy this morning's gospel? Bartimaeus is a real character; it's hard not to like him! He calls out, naming Jesus "Son of David," so he's been listening to what people say about Jesus, and Bartimaeus asks for mercy. And it doesn't matter that people around him try to shush him – he yells even louder.

In Jesus' time, both blindness and poverty were taken as signs of punishment for sin. That's why the people around Bartimaeus try to hush him up – here's this sinner calling out to a revered teacher. But he calls, and it works – Jesus answers.

Jesus had been dealing with different people in his travels. Last Sunday, we heard the disciples ask for status and power when Jesus asked them what they wanted from him.

Bartimaeus asks that his need be met – "let me see again." And just like that, he goes from beggar to disciple.

The Sunday before that, we heard how a rich man so depends on his wealth that he can't give it up to follow Jesus. Yet when Bartimaeus the beggar is called to come, he throws aside his coat to go to Jesus.

Bartimaeus knows he's free to ignore the neighbors telling him to be quiet; he's free to call for help and make his needs known. Perhaps he senses that in the presence of Jesus Christ outward rules do not exist. Blind Bartimaeus is Bartimaeus, Child of God. And he seizes his

faith and courage to live into that freedom. By knowing his need and trusting that Jesus can provide, being willing to give up what he has in order to follow, Bartimaeus is saved – restored.

In our Thursday Bible class a few weeks ago we talked about “Amazing Grace,” the hymn we’ll be singing in a few minutes. Members of our group encouraged me to share the story of the words loved by so many people, so here it is.

The text was written by John Newton, who was English and lived in the 1700’s. By the end of his life he was an Anglican priest, a poet, and an abolitionist, but things didn’t start out that way for him at all.

Newton’s mother died when he was a boy, and his father, a sea captain, took him to sea when he was just 11. Newton was later impressed into the British Navy, and when he tried to escape was beaten and knocked down in rank to common seaman.

When he finally did get out of the Navy, Newton was involved in the Atlantic slave trade for many years. Once, he was caught in a storm so severe he called out to God for mercy, and considered this his conversion moment. But Newton stayed in the slave trade for another six or seven years after that. Then he became a Christian, eventually was ordained, and began writing hymns along with a poet in his parish.

Newton wrote “Amazing Grace” to go with his New Year’s Day sermon in 1773. He was active in the anti-slavery movement, and in a pamphlet titled “Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade,” described the terrible conditions on the ships and apologized for waiting so long to make a public statement about his past life: “It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.”

Quite a story. And so we join other churches today, hearing about the healing of Blind Bartimaeus, in singing about the amazing grace that touched John Newton, restoring and saving him.

Just as they were free, we are free. Because God knows us and God loves us.

It can be hard for us to believe the words “I love you” without also hearing “I know you.” We may have many brushed-up, public faces. But God promises us absolute acceptance *and* unconditional love. The living God we know through Jesus Christ knows us and loves us, sees through our pretense and accepts us just as we are. Not who we’re planning or hoping to be, but who we are right now.

And so we are free, as God’s beloved children, to risk and serve and care, to love just as God loves us. To sing, “I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.” Amen.