

Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me'

In the name etc.

Where have you found unlikely inspiration? Has anyone ever told you a surprising truth? There are two ways in which inspiration can be unlikely and truths can be surprising. The first is through the nature of the truth or inspiration themselves. This can be either gratifying or disappointing. As WS Gilbert wrote in HMS Pinafore: Things are seldom what they seem, skimmed milk masquerades as cream.

The other way that truths or inspirations can surprise is when they come from an unexpected source. For instance, a joke in a sermon will always be funnier because it you don't expect a vicar to make you laugh. There is I'm afraid, no prospect of that changing over the course of the sermon today.

It is a trope in films and in novels that we recognise, probably because it is true. In reality, I think it is often from the unlikely figures and characters who have the most profound things to say.

Indeed, it is a regular theme in the Gospels, that those who are physically blind are seen to have a deeper spiritual insight. It is what we see today, when Blind Bartimeus recognises Christ and his nature when the religious leaders have failed to do so. The message is clear- the faith Christ comes to bring is not about externals, what we might call 'walk through' religion, going through the motions, but about a profound change to the soul within. Hearts and minds transfigured into tools for and of the living and loving God. Bartimeus's blindness causes the world to look upon him with scorn or pity, yet he is the source of a truer claim than even the disciples can manage. He recognises that what he needs from God in Christ is mercy. It forces the question in us- what might we be turning a blind eye to? In the world or in our own lives. What part might we need to ask for mercy for?

In some ways then, we have the exact inverse of the incident we encountered last week with James and John. They began their encounter with Christ with a straight up demand, an order which they expect to be fulfilled. They asked for prominence, indeed for preeminence. They asked for what they thought they deserved to be given.

Bartimeus's request is different. He does not begin with his demands. Instead he starts with a plea for mercy. He understands that what we deserve from God is judgement- and yet what we get is grace. He understands that to open our hearts to the rewards of God's love then we have to first acknowledge our failures and our sin. To be made whole we first have to acknowledge that we are broken.

As it was with Bartimeus, so it must be with us. There is a reason why one of the central parts of our service is our confession and absolution. We don't do this to beat ourselves up or to even to make ourselves feel better. We begin with confessing what

is wrong because it is only by doing so that we can move to the place of healing, of wholeness and of love where God would have us be.

Indeed our whole liturgy is shaped by this movement and by the dynamic of mercy: from repentance to reconciliation, from fallen humanity to a oneness with God. From sin to love. We move from the confession of our sins to the moment of oneness with the living God in bread and wine, body and blood.

Think, what toils and cares do you bring with you to this place? Whatever they are, lay them down. For you come, in the moment of direct communion with the Divine to the ultimate place of healing. We come to receive the body and blood by which the ultimate reconciliation- between fallen humanity and the God of love- was made. We come then, asking for mercy, and receiving it a thousandfold.

This is the unlikely, surprising truth round which we gather. That is what God offers to each of you. No matter what despair or worry or sin you have on your hearts. That is what is offered to you all in the elements of the Eucharist. That is what calls you here today: mercy rooted in love regardless of what you have laid upon it. So- in the words of the Gospel itself- take heart, get up, he is calling you.

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