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St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Reformation Day - Year B

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Psalm 126

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 10:46-52

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

46As [Jesus] and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." 50So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." 52Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

The Gospel of our Lord.

### **Prayer**

Let us pray,

Amen

### **Reformation Day**

Good Morning! Today is Reformation Day! Last year I preached, and I'm sure you all remember, that Reformation Day is a day of both celebration and lament. We celebrate the good work done by reformers like Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon, and mourn the split of the church that was the result of their disagreements with the Catholic Church at the time. So today I won't rehash that argument, suffice it to say that we don't celebrate the break with the Catholic church and we sure don't take shots at the Catholics. No, today we celebrate the wonderful things that the Reformation stood for, the many good changes that took place as a result of what they did.

Two things that became an important part of the Reformation movement and reformation theology are highlighted in today's text. Blind Bartimaeus sits by the road calling out to Jesus. In the whole of the Gospel of Mark only Jairus and Bartimaeus are named specifically as characters in the story apart from main players like the disciples, Pilate, and Herod.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel of Mark is broken up with two major healings. The first is a multiple part healing process of another blind man. It marks the transition of the first half of the story into the middle. The second healing is what we have before us today, and it happens as a transition towards Jesus' traveling to Jerusalem, and ultimately the cross.

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<sup>1</sup>Donahue, John R., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Mark*. (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002), 317.

You will notice a few interesting details in the healing story. Or, to be more specific, you will notice a LACK of details. While the text is still a miracle story, it takes a back seat to dialogue that happens around the healing.

Bartimaeus calls out for Jesus, and the crowd only tries to shut him up. So, he shouts all the louder until Jesus hears and asks for him to be brought over. Bartimaeus has been cut off from society, pushed to the outskirts and ignored. One of the things that was so important to the early reformers was the need to include everyone. Martin Luther pushed to have the service spoken in the common language of the time, not Latin, a language that not everyone could understand. He pushed to have the Bible accessible in German, so that anyone could pick up scripture and be fed by God's word.

Have you ever felt that cut off? Sometimes it's like the reformers, unable to understand God, other times it's like Bartimaeus and you can feel like society casts you off to the side, ignoring your pleas.

I'm going to share a story, and I'm honestly pretty embarrassed by it. It's weird because some of these kids became my best friends but during middle school it was a little rough for me at lunch. I don't know how it started, or how it evolved. But for some reason I ended up carrying all the trash from my table during lunch in 6th and 7th grade. Maybe my Obsessive Compulsive Disorder had me picking up some loose trash one day and it evolved from there, I don't know. But almost every day at lunch I always ended up carrying most of the table's trays up to throw away. I tried to complain, but like Bartimaeus I was told to be quiet. I know what you're thinking, why not just leave the trash? Well for some reason I felt like I couldn't. I wanted to fit in, so after a few complaints I would normally cave. Maybe I felt like since the trash was in front

of me I would get in trouble if I didn't take it, or maybe the OCD wouldn't let me leave the mess. Either way, I took up the trash, feeling the same way I feel sharing now, ashamed the whole time.

It's strange how sharing something from so long ago can make me feel so bad. And that was just one little instance over a short period of time. Now imagine what Bartimaeus and the others that Jesus healed would have endured. Maybe you have a similar story from your own childhood. Now when it comes to the reformation, it might seem like a stretch to say that having the service in an understandable language or being able to make sense of what scripture was saying could be an alienating thing, I promise you that in all of these cases the result was the same: cut off from God and the community of believers that could sustain you.

But Bartimaeus' story and the story of the Reformation are more than that. As Dr. Timothy J. Wengert, retired Lutheran Confessions professor and this fall's teacher for the ACTS class has said the central writings of the Lutheran church are about people confessing their faith. Bartimaeus too believes. Dr. Lamar Williamson Jr. writes the following:

*“Bartimaeus offers a particularly vivid case study of faith. His crying out to Jesus, even with a less than perfect perception of who Jesus is, his persistent refusal to be silenced, his bold and eager response to Jesus' call, mediated through anonymous third parties, and his clear focus on the one thing he wanted most in all the world, together with his keen anticipation that Jesus could and would grant it, are the attitudes and actions which Jesus calls 'faith.' Its genuineness is demonstrated by the fact that Bartimaeus having received his sight, followed Jesus on his*

way.”<sup>2</sup> His reaction and actions following his healing stand in direct opposition to the behavior of the disciples just a few short verses ago, a story you heard last Sunday.<sup>3</sup>

Reading the texts for this week I was struck by how powerfully the readings call for us to make space for everyone at the table. Dr. Williamson Jr. again sums it up best saying: “*The text calls attention to persons who, though lost in the crowd, may be eager for some vital contact with Jesus Christ... For either outsiders or insiders, ‘what do you want me to do for you?’ underlines the importance of getting our deepest desires straight... ‘Prayer is the soul’s sincere desire, unuttered or expressed.’*”<sup>4</sup> Who is missing around us today? It makes me wonder, how might the world change if we had faith like Bartimaeus, how might those who go on to do evil, how might their lives have been changed if we had showed them the love of Jesus Christ? If Robert Bowers had known the depth and un-ending love and mercy of God, would the shooting in Pittsburgh have still happened? If we called on our leaders to encourage mutual respect and understanding instead of only polarizing all decisions would Cesar Sayoc still have sent those bombs? I’m not sure, but I do know we often act like we have very little faith in what God could accomplish. And yet in the midst of pain and suffering Jesus calls out. He heals a blind man who refused to be silent. At other times Jesus works in the hearts of angry and overweight German monks who go on to change the world. It brings me back to the words of our first reading, a hope I cling to:

“<sup>7</sup>*Thus says the Lord:*

*Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,*

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<sup>2</sup>Williamson, Lamar. *Mark*. Louisville, Ky: (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 197-198.

<sup>3</sup>Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Vol. VII*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015), 496.

<sup>4</sup>Williamson, Lamar. *Mark*. Louisville, Ky: (Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 199.

*and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;*

*proclaim, give praise, and say,*

*“Save, O Lord, your people,*

*the remnant of Israel.”*

*8See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,*

*and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,*

*among them the blind and the lame,*

*those with child and those in labor, together;*

*a great company, they shall return here.*

*9With weeping they shall come,*

*and with consolations I will lead them back,*

*I will let them walk by brooks of water,*

*in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;*

*for I have become a father to Israel,*

*and Ephraim is my firstborn.”<sup>5</sup>*

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup>Jeremiah 31:7-9 (NRSV)