

Sermon for Sunday, October 25, 2015
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

It's twenty-nine years
since I first preached
on the story of the healing
of blind Bartimaeus.
I was twenty years old,
a college student,
and the church I went to
took seriously the words of the apostle Paul
when he said that each and every one of us
is given gifts
for the building up of the church
and the spreading of the gospel, the good news
of Jesus Christ.

Everyone
was expected
to play a part
in the life of the church.

And so Doris sat at the front of the church
after the service each week
and offered to pray with anyone who wanted prayer.
She was in her eighties, I guess,
and it was an added bonus that her memory was fading;
that way you could share the most personal things
without fear
that they would get repeated
or held against you.

Daryl and Sherri
hosted a weekly bible study in their tiny two bedroom home,
where we all took turns to watch their kids, Rachel and Sam,
and baby Zachary when he came along.

Gary and Scott
invited me to hang out with them and their friends after church each week,

even though
I was a good ten years younger - which is a lot
when you're barely out of your teens.

And Shannon was just there,
raised in the projects, and cared for mostly by her grandmother,
she spent much of her spare time
hanging out round the church,
helping wherever she could,
and getting the attention
she missed out on elsewhere.

And there were people who played various musical instruments in church,
or welcomed homesick college students for meals,
or went into the projects to lead a Sunday afternoon service and youth program.

One of the things about that church
was that there were training sessions for everything.

There was an all day session on how to lead a bible study
and a weekend retreat on counseling;
regular classes in liturgical dance in preparation for performing at the annual street fair,
and Sunday afternoon workshops on how to welcome newcomers.
And then there was the preaching class,
twelve evenings, one every second week, where we learned some theory
and then preached in front of our peers and our priest.
It was in that class
that I first preached about Bartimaeus,
and the result of that class
that I ended up ordained.

I don't have a copy of that sermon,
one of two I preached that year.
But I do remember
imagining how each of the characters,
Bartimaeus,
the disciples
and the crowd
might have felt that day.

They were heading towards Jerusalem,
heading towards the city
where Jesus would be welcomed in triumph
and then, less than a week later
die in disgrace.

And as they left the town,
a long day's walk
and one which it was essential to begin early
so that you weren't caught out
in the heat of the day.

So the last thing you would want
would be to be delayed as you left.

No wonder the crowds
wanted the blind man to be quiet.

His shouting
was distracting;
his demands
threatened to delay them
as they headed on up
to the great holy city.

"Be quiet," they said.

"Stop bothering Jesus.

He's on a pilgrimage;
let him go in peace."

But the blind man, Bartimaeus, was desperate.
This was his only chance, the only chance
he had ever had
to see.

So he shouted even louder.

And Jesus heard him,
and stopped.

"That man shouting? Call him here."

And the very same people
who had been telling him to be quiet
changed their tune,
and called him forward,

and he jumped up, leaving his cloak and his begging bowl behind,
and went to Jesus.

“What do you want me to do?”

asked Jesus.

the same question

he had asked of the brothers James and John,

when they had come to him

a couple of days earlier.

“Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” was their
answer.

Bartimaeus’s was much simpler.

“Please teacher, let me see.”

And Jesus

said to him,

“Your faith has made you well.”

And he could see again.

But that’s perhaps not the most important part.

Because unlike many others whom Jesus healed,

Bartimaeus didn’t just go home to get on with his life, which in that instant became
dramatically better.

No,

he left his cloak and begging bowl

where they were,

and he followed Jesus,

all the way to Jerusalem,

all the way to the cross.

That story of Bartimaeus

will forever be entwined in my mind

with the lives of the people in that parish

where I first preached about him,

and where I learned so much of how to be a follower of Jesus.

Doris has long since gone to be with the savior she loved so much.

Daryl and Sherri are grandparents.

Gary and Scott are ordained.

Shannon

is raising two teenagers alone, and battling cancer.

But all of them
were important
in helping me
follow Jesus.

This month
we've been focussing on stewardship.
And we tend to think about stewardship
as being how to be good stewards of our time,
our gifts,
and our money,
in the the service of God.
But there's something else that we are stewards of.
We are stewards of one another.
God has given us each other as a gift,
each and everyone of us here.

And I wonder,
are we the ones in the crowd
helping to others to follow Jesus?
Or are we the ones
who are getting in the way?

And so, once again, I ask you to find a couple of other people, preferably not related to you,
and talk about how you can encourage one another
in your journey of following Jesus.