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## Sermon

### ***Bold, Persistent, Faithful and Repentant***

Mark 10:46-52; Hebrews 7:23-28; 2 Chronicles 7:11-15

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There are many ways of speaking to each other. Depending on purpose, setting, audience and mood, our way of speaking changes. What is appropriate between mother and baby is different from Father and teenage son. How we speak at home is different from a speech at toastmasters. Our communication styles vary.

So it is prayer. It is not all liturgical and formal nor is it always the thought of the moment. It isn't all asking or all thanking; not all about forgiveness; not all lists of people we should pray for. Prayer is as varied as the subject and the circumstance.

In today's gospel reading we have an example of Bold and Persistent Prayer. The disciples encounter a blind beggar at Jericho. The man was calling out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" He was loud and persistent so that many people were irritated by him and wanted him to be quiet – it must have been quite a ruckus! He was determined. He must have heard about Jesus and his miraculous healings and he knew what he wanted. When they tried to shut him up, he cried out "much more."

He called Jesus, "Son of David" – a title of the Messiah. Well, Jesus stopped and called him, Bartimaeus jumped to his feet and came to him. This is all determination and passion.

Mark gives us the detail that he threw aside his cloak. It is hot in Jericho – certainly when we were there in June it was in the early 40's - almost too hot to get out of the bus! A beggar didn't need a cloak for warmth but to sit on and for catching any money thrown to him. I have heard it said that it was also a mark that he had been approved by the religious authorities as a genuine beggar. By casting aside his cloak he was making a break with the past. He expected not to beg after meeting Jesus. That was faith!

Then Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" This is exactly the same question Jesus had asked James and John in the previous account in the chapter. They had wanted status; Bartimaeus wanted his sight. Jesus saw his faith, declared him healed and he was!

The next sentence is almost a footnote – he followed Jesus in the way. He wanted his sight but he also wanted Jesus. Isn't that important! Too often people want what Jesus gives but him himself. But Bartimaeus has a different spirit. He went on to follow Jesus on the way. The Way was very early name for Christianity. In other words, he started to follow Jesus and continued once the church was formed at Pentecost as an early Christian. The fact that his name is given suggests he was known to the early Christian audience of the gospel account.

What do we learn from Bartimaeus? There is a place for determined, bold and passion prayer. Jesus recognised it as faith. He is not offended by some unseemliness of the behaviour. If we have real needs, we should be real and determined in our asking. But let us value the giver more highly than the gifts. Let us be clear we are seeking to follow Jesus on the Way, not merely gather pennies by the roadside.

## **Repentant prayer**

The Old Testament reading is a promise of God's favour when we come to in repentance. The occasion is after the dedication of Solomon's temple. That night, Solomon was given a vision of the Lord. It was an answer to Solomon's prayer as the temple was dedicated. It was a long and involved prayer in Chapter 6 about God answering prayers towards the temple when people were in distress:

- When they are defeated in battle ...
- When there is drought because of your people's sin ...
- When famine, plague or enemies come ...
- When your people go to war
- When your people sin against you and end up in exile and then repent, with all their heart and soul, then hear and forgive.

It was a comprehensive list of needs. In the vision that night, God said yes to Solomon:

Verse 13-15 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, <sup>14</sup> if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. <sup>15</sup> Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

The promise related to Jewish people praying towards the temple, but the promises of God are "Yes and Amen in Christ."<sup>1</sup> When we are in need, when troubles come – drought, famine, plague – God is wanting us to turn to him for help.

Verse 15: If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Healing our land is restoring provision that was interrupted by drought, famine or devastation and rescue us from plague.

To pray for help is humbling. We must acknowledge we don't have all the answers – that we are dependent on God. We have to acknowledge he knows better than we do and that we often deliberately disobeyed.

What does "seek his face" mean? Psalm 27:8-9 helps us:

My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek. <sup>9</sup> Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Saviour.

Seeking his face is relating openly with God – being honest before him and in turn his acceptance of us neither rejecting nor forsaking us.

Turn from their wicked ways is obvious although perhaps we avoid thinking about or acting on it when we are disobedient.

So if these conditions are met - humbling ourselves, praying, being open with him and repentant – then as a general principle God promises to act and bring relief from the affliction.

## **Our situation:**

I need to explain that this is not just theory. I am preaching on prayer because we as a parish are in a difficult financial situation – we need to pray! In the last two months, Carl has given updates of the finances showing a decline in our financial position. Giving is considerably below budget, the Op Shop profit is down, while we have had significant unbudgeted expenses this year.

Basically, if we don't increase our income we will have to cut our expenses and that threatens staff salaries and most directly the programme of children's and family outreach. At the end of the service as you go out, you will be given a letter with an update from the last Vestry meeting, so I won't take more time to explain it further now.

This is serious and I am calling us as a parish to prayer and (if you will) fasting before the Lord. Fasting is good for humbling ourselves. Our bodies don't like it. But as we do it, we are saying to God that we are setting this prayer and situation above our bodies' desires.

I have taken us through the example of Bartimaeus who was bold, persistent and full of faith. Will you pray boldly, persistently and faithfully about this situation?

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 1:20

We have heard about God's words to Solomon. As a parish we are facing a famine, a blight on our income and we need to humble ourselves. God is the true provider of everything – we need to ask for his help. We need to seek his face and repent of anything displeasing to him.

As we do that, we can take comfort that Hebrews tells us that Jesus is interceding for us always. “[Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (Hebrews 7:25) We can ask for his prayer for us as well as depending on the Holy Spirit to lead us in prayer and also to intercede for us.

Because Jesus is our high priest we are encouraged to approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

#### *How should we pray?*

- Persistent, bold, expectant prayer.
- Repenting of any wrong attitude or action.
- Asking Jesus to intercede for us

#### *What should we pray for?*

Pray for God to provide for us, through our giving, through the Op Shop and any other way he may wish to do that. Pray that God would move our hearts to generosity.

#### *Where and When?*

Pray at home. Pray in home groups – homegroup leaders would you make a point of setting aside some time for this in your meetings until the end of November? Pray here at church, in the chapel (Monday, Wednesday, Friday mornings: 9-12; especially Wed 11-12 our regular prayer meeting.)

During the week, the treasurer will be posting everyone a letter about the need and ways you can help. We need to pray and we will need to give.

### **Chara's gift**

Yesterday, we had a visitor. Chara Fowler brought something for me. Wendy told her what was happening so she wouldn't be upset overhearing people talking. Chara asked if she could be the first person in the church to contribute to the appeal. She brought a letter to me. I asked her permission to read it to you.

Dear Ian,

Please use this money so we can keep Tony. It is from jobs I did. I do not need it. I would be very sad if we did not have Messy Church, Sunday School and mainly music at our Church.

Sincerely, Chara.

Chara is 8 years old. She brought her savings and gave me \$30.

I have told you, because I think she has set a great example to us all. If a little girl is prepared to give her savings that challenges us adults to respond proportionately. If we don't then she puts us to shame.

Let me close with a Prayer entitled “In time of dearth and famine” from the Book of Common Prayer.

O God, heavenly Father, whose gift it is, that the rain doth fall, the earth is fruitful, beasts increase, and fishes do multiply; Behold, we beseech thee, the afflictions of thy people; and grant that the scarcity and dearth, which we do now most justly suffer for our iniquity, may through thy goodness be mercifully turned into cheapness and plenty, for the love of Jesus Christ our Lord ; to whom with thee, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.

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