



The Church's prayer for Sunday 24th October

Almighty God,
in whose service lies perfect freedom:
teach us to obey you
with loving hearts and steadfast wills;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bible Readings and Reflection for Sunday 24th October

A reading from Hebrews 7:23-end

²³ Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; ²⁴ but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

²⁶ Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

A Gospel reading from Mark 10:46-end

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

A reflection from Revd Claire Robertson, Lead Minister for Barton, Coton, Harlton and Haslingfield

In the 1980s when Bernard D'Ascoli, a boy who had been blind since he was three, reached the finals of Leeds international piano competition the news hit the headlines and many television interviews followed. When interviewers asked him about the difficulties of being a blind pianist he said he considered it an advantage as he listened better. As concert pianists play from memory he explained he was able to learn all his scores in Braille.

Through courage, determination and inspiration he had gained equality, with his fully sighted peers. He was a pianist who happened to be blind – not a blind pianist.

One of the highlights of 2021 for me has been watching the amazing athletes in the Paralympics from Tokyo and hear their inspiring stories.

The Paralympic values are courage, determination inspiration and equality which reminded me of Bernard's story.

The athletes' stories are equally inspirational and gave us an insight into how important it is to encourage others to develop their talents and to find ways to be inclusive in our society and our church communities.

How do we do that?

The gospel story gives us a clue – where listening well to others features rather prominently.

We hear that Bartimaeus is at the roadside begging when Jesus with a large crowd around him prepares to leave the city. Bartimaeus summons up courage and shouts at the top of his voice to Jesus. He gives Jesus the title "Son of David" and asks for help. The Jewish people know that their Messiah, the longed for Saviour will be descended from King David so Bartimaeus is showing his faith in Jesus and with simplicity and expectancy asking for help.

He must have a pretty loud voice because he is heard above the noise of the moving crowd! People with disabilities, in first century Palestine, are tolerated as beggars but they are not supposed to draw attention to themselves in this way and people in the crowd are clearly embarrassed by him because they tell him to be quiet.

But Jesus is listening. He is just starting out on a journey, a journey that will save the world, but he finds time to stop and to ask the crowd to call Bartimaeus. Whenever we ask Jesus for help he listens to us too and call us to him. Sometimes, as in this story, he may call us and send a messenger with the call.

Jesus' action changes the attitude of the crowd towards Bartimaeus. Instead of being embarrassed and disapproving the people are now interested and encouraging . This reminds me that even one voice spoken in solidarity with those who ask for help can influence others.

The effect on Bartimaeus is transformational. He throws his cloak aside, which is probably one of his most important possessions for keeping him warm at nights, he leaps to his feet and comes to Jesus. His whole focus is on Jesus.

Here, at last, is someone who is taking time to listen to him.

At this point Jesus asks him “What do you want me to do for you?” He asks Bartimaeus what he wants- he doesn’t tell him - he asks him and listens to the reply. This empowers Bartimaeus.

“Teacher,” he says “I want to see”.

Spiritually, Bartimaeus is already quite clear sighted. He has acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah and he trusts him to help him.

Jesus heals him, affirming his faith and says “Go” giving Bartimaeus the freedom to leave. Bartimaeus has voiced one need, in his case his wish to have his sight restored and been listened to. But his deeper need is to be a follower of Jesus and he immediately follows Jesus along the road.

Throughout the gospels we hear of Jesus taking time to go up a mountain or to go to a quiet place to listen to God in the silence. This enabled Jesus in the middle of a busy day with a crowd around him to hear the voice of Bartimaeus who needed him.

We also, if we are to hear the voices of others, in a busy timetable, need to make time to be silent and listen to God. As Bernard D’Ascoli pointed out, listening is an essential factor in being a musician it is also essential in Christian discipleship. Amen