

**SERMON PROPER 25B:** Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Psalm 34:1-8; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52  
**Barnabas Punsur, Sunday, October 28, 2018**

In today's readings both Job and Bartimaeus begin to see. Job cries out to God "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you". And Bartimaeus cries out to Jesus ""My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well."" Both Job and Bartimaeus have a transformative experience after a very hard and difficult period in their lives.

For Job the anguish continues for 41 out of the 42 chapters of the book that tells his story. He has lost things necessary to make life physically pleasant, lost familial relationships, and is also at loss to find meaning in all this. That meaning which could have made his life a little tolerable. He was at the edge, at the limits of his body, his emotions and his understanding.

Bartimaeus lived at the edge of society. In order to avoid the pain of a hungry stomach he had to beg. A blind beggar like him commanded no respect in society and lived at the mercy of people. He sat by the roadside.

I have never lost everything like Job, nor have I ever sat by the roadside and begged. But, I can imagine how painful and desperate both of them might have been. I can imagine because, these are things that we still know that people in our city and in our world face. Many displaced and refugees lose everything they have, both things needed to physically survive and also things needed to give them hope. Like Job many lose their most intimate relationships to war, conflict and catastrophes. Like Bartimaeus they are many who struggle with poverty. About 40 million people in the US live below the poverty threshold, which is about \$20000 income a year for a 3 member household. Nearly half of the world's population lives on less than \$2.50 a day and according to UNICEF 22,000 children die each day due to poverty.

These are cries of desperation in the world. In the Church's liturgical calendar, this Sunday, October 28 is observed as feast day of Saint Simon and Saint Jude. Saint Jude is the patron saint of Impossible Cases, Lost Causes, and Desperate situations. One of his namesakes is St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, and - this might come as a surprise to some of you - he is also the patron saint of the Chicago Police Department. Why do we have a patron saint of desperate situations? I think it's because we know that as human beings each of us has some experience of pain and suffering. Maybe at a lesser lever than Job or Bartimaeus, but once in a while we too experience in our own lives that desperation, that experience of being on the edge, fearful that we may fall, the experience of painful loss. In this common bond of humanity we know that the world including ourselves need deliverance, wholeness, salvation, restoration and fullness.

M. M. Thomas, a prominent Indian theologian, stressed on the idea that salvation was a lot like humanization- the process whereby each person acquires a state of fullness, a state of human dignity. He argued that the task of the church is to ensure that this humanization was experienced by all, especially those that are in desperate conditions. My grandfather was a young boy when his family, and in fact his entire community decided that they wanted to become Christians. There were mass conversions to Christianity during this time in different parts of India from a certain section of the Indian society, to which my grandfather also belonged. This section, now called the dalits, were considered so ritually impure in the caste hierarchy of India, that they were pushed to the very margins of society and forced to live the most despicable of human lives. They had no rights, no land, and did not even own their bodies. To them the message of the Gospel was a message of deliverance- an invitation to human dignity and fullness.

The Gospel was a transformative experience in their lives. Just like Job and Bartimaeus experienced deliverance and restoration, they too experienced deliverance. But what can our small SPR community do about the desperate conditions that are all around us and out there in the world. I strongly believe that ultimately both sustenance and deliverance come from God. I also believe that more often than not, God chooses to bring about this deliverance and fullness through the actions of people. We live in a culture where we are taught that the ideal is to be self-sufficient and strongly independent. But in truth, none of us are really self-sufficient. God has made us in a way that we in fact need the support of others in our lives. We are meant to live in an interdependent existence with other people.

So how can we possibly become a community in and through which God brings about deliverance and fullness? I think we start at our church's motto and think deeply about its implications. Our motto reads: we stand for the radical hospitality of Jesus. I believe we must constantly ask ourselves what does this radical hospitality mean, in real and concrete ways.

In the case of Bartimaeus, when Jesus heard the persistent and insistent cry of the blind beggar on the roadside, he decided that in spite of the disorder that was being caused or the time that it would take away from his schedule, he ought to stop and converse with Bartimaeus. That was the radical hospitality of Jesus and the beginning of deliverance for Bartimaeus. On the one hand we come to this community because we seek this radical hospitality from the church. We open ourselves to God and the community and seek deliverance and fullness. We recognize our interdependence and receive through others the grace of God. On the other hand being part of this community also means that we show this radical hospitality to others around us in this community. Taking a moment, to stop and converse. To invite and share. To listen and pray. Who knows for these simple actions can become an opening for someone who is in a desperate place to experience that deliverance and fullness from God.

I believe God has a definite purpose for our church to be in the neighborhood we are in, to be in the city we are in, and to be in the times we are in. Radical hospitality would mean we open our doors, our time, and the life of our community both to receive from our neighbors and give to our neighbors. In those interactions deliverance will come about. Due to our common bonds of humanity, we seek that radical hospitality to bring about deliverance in the world where there is desperate need.

We may like Job's friends have sympathy, we may have good intentions towards those who are suffering and we may have some theory to make sense of the kind of extreme suffering in the world. But the cries of suffering are sometimes just too loud and insist on being heard and acted upon. These cries don't care much for neat explanations or quite decorum. When Bartimaeus shouted, many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but this only made him cry even more loudly.

The Psalmist in today's Psalm says "Taste and see that the Lord is good." I pray that this community may become a place where each of us can taste and see God and the deliverance that comes from God. I pray that we become channels through which those seeking for deliverance in our neighborhood and in the world can taste and see that the Lord is Good. I pray that we stand for the radical hospitality of Jesus both as individuals and as community.

Amen.