

Weekend of Sunday, October 28, 2018
23rd Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 30/Proper 25/Year B
Primary Text: Mark 10:46-52
Sermon Title: “Reflecting God's Goodness with our Time”

Theme

Bartimaeus comes to Jesus with faith, asking that he might see again. Recognizing Jesus' identity, Bartimaeus is the first person to call him “Son of David” in the Gospel of Mark.

Text

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.

Sermon

I want to begin by thanking all the Council table leaders for co-presenting with me over the last seven weeks of the sermon series on the Seven Faith Practices. You, Table Leaders, made it more fun and interesting, and the Congregation thanks you too.

I also want to thank all of you for all your kind and affirming words received over the last seven weeks. I heard you say that now you get it, now you understand, and now the Seven Faith Practices and how Council has used them to organize the ministry we do together makes sense. And I heard you mention that you appreciated learning that the life of the disciple can be defined simply by these seven faith practices.

Now I hope *knowing better* converts to *doing better* in all aspects of your life of discipleship. And what a clever segue to the next topic on our liturgical agenda.

Welcome to the brief three-part 2019 Stewardship Campaign which we have entitled, "Reflecting God's Goodness."

Traditionally the church has considered personal stewardship to have three aspects; Time, Talent, and Treasure, and indeed, those three will be the topics of the sermons over this and the next couple of weeks.

Having fussed with these three aspects of personal stewardship for many years, well before I entered the ordained ministry, I have always thought that time and talent are a bit blurred.

For example, with church and school shooting in the news all too frequently, over the last three years or so we, your Church staff and the Councils have been fussing with what to do about the security of our staff, members, and children of our school. Well, it turns out that we have a very highly trained member of the Sheriff's SWAT Team in our membership who agreed to take the lead on our Critical Incident preparedness. He is by nature suspicious and is always looking around and noticing anything that is ... out of place, unusual.

Well, he affirmed many of our security details like video surveillance inside and outside the building, and some of our procedures. But then he gave us a list of

details that we should consider doing. Some changes you know about, like changing of the locks and adding fob stations, acquiring tablets so ushers can have eyes on the premises even while in the sanctuary worshipping.

Other enhancements you don't need to know about, but rest assured, we have taken this expert's advice in keeping you as safe as possible. And given the shooting in a Pittsburgh synagogue Saturday morning, aren't we thankful that he made himself available to us now. By the way, many law enforcement personnel are not fond of having their vocations outed, so I will refrain from telling you who he is.

Here is the point, is his natural proclivity a Talent, or is he simply using his education and work experience to donate his Time to the Church he loves. I am not sure. I am also not sure that it matters. But if over the next three weeks I blur the lines between Time and Talent in a way you find inappropriate, I ask your forgiveness in advance.

I am certain that when you heard me say the words "stewardship campaign" your mind went right to money. And indeed, in the third weekend of November 11th, that will be the subject. But maybe you are like me; money is the easiest of those three aspects to share. Although good stewardship of our personal finances is always an issue for all of us, at least for Carol and me, we either have the cash to contribute to a cause or we don't. We don't have to think about it a lot.

Time, at least for me, is the biggest issue. I am into the Church office by 9:00 AM Monday through Thursday and often before 8:00 AM. I almost always work past 4:30 PM and in some weeks I come back for meetings or a discipleship class three and four nights a week. Friday is my day off if we don't have a funeral or some other event that requires my attention. I might come in a later on Saturday but I have a service on Saturday night so I don't leave until 6:30 or 7:00 PM. Then it's up again on Sunday morning where I am usually at the Church by 7:00 AM and home again by 1:00 PM. And on weekends like this one when we have confirmation, I will be back between 4:30 and 7:00 PM Sunday evening.

And I don't like to say *no* to anyone. Last week I actually took a week off to work on a room I am finishing in my basement, but I had to come in Tuesday to talk to the lock-smith, Wednesday night to lead the discipleship class, and on Friday I was here for ZCELC's Fall Harvest Festival, and I counselled someone over the phone.

I am rarely really and truly "off duty". And I tell you this not to make sure you know how much I knock myself out for you, but to illustrate how Time for me is my most critical of the three aspects of personal stewardship.

And to apply one of my axioms to myself, "I am not that special." I have heard many retired people say that in retirement you are busier than you ever were when you worked for a living. And you that have children, I know, you want to provide every opportunity for your child as they develop and figure out who they are. Been there, done that.

One of our members was recently recruited to go to Florida for hurricane relief and he went and came back full of stories of how he was blessed by the work he did on behalf of people he didn't know and often never met. He took personal days off of work to make the trip. I wish I had the ability to do that. Maybe someday.

Let us take a look at the example of Jesus – always a good idea. Do you think he was busy? YES! Take today's Gospel Reading as an example. Jesus travelled from place to place to do ministry and in the theater of my mind, I see him being followed by his own Twelve Disciples, but also a large crowd of people who either benefitted personally from his ministry or who witnessed it and wanted more. More what? I doubt they knew, but they did know was that in him they witnessed something special and attractive.

So in this particular passage Jesus was leaving Jericho. Mark told us nothing about what he did there specifically, but no doubt it was spectacular because he wrote that as he left he was followed by a large crowd. And as he exited to the town, there was a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus begging alongside the road. Notice the detail that Mark included:

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!"

I want to point out two details:

- 1) The way in which Bartimaeus identified Jesus as "Son of David" is telling. You see, the ancient prophets foretold that God's Messiah would be a

descendent of David, a "Son of David." So among the crowd including his disciples, who had just previously argued amongst themselves which one of them was greatest, a blind beggar was the one person who *saw* Jesus for who he really was.

- 2) Notice the crowd's response. To them, Bartimaeus was a nuisance and a bother to the busy-looking and forward-facing Jesus, whomever they thought he was.

You see, obviously there was something about Jesus that gave others the impression that he was focused, busy, not to be bothered. But they were obviously wrong. Jesus was not too busy to do that which was his true calling, bringing wholeness and God's love to all people through his own example.

So today, in this first installment of the three-part personal stewardship series, entitled "Reflecting God's Goodness" I want to ask you to reflect on your true calling. Yes, I know, all of you are a parent, grandparent, child, employee, member of an organization, member of this Church. Yes, I know, you are interested and sometimes passionate about these activities and commitments and the demands they make on your time. I get that.

But among all the callings and titles you have ever been given or accepted, right after "child of your parents" you became a baptized child of God and a member of his church.

As you bring your children to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

*to live with them among God's faithful people,
bring them to the word of God and the holy supper,
teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
place in their hands the holy scriptures,
and nurture them in faith and prayer,
so that your children may learn to trust God,
proclaim Christ through word and deed,
care for others and the world God made,*

I am not going to take the time to read this to you but this is what that means. This is the sacred oath you took, or most likely your parents made on your behalf if you were baptized as a child. It's called the Covenant of Baptism and there is a lightly modified version of it that you made when you became a member of this specific Church, whenever that was.

How are you doing with that?

I haven't taken the time to add up how many funerals I've done at Zion in the last six-plus years, but it's a bunch. And mostly they are the generation that is currently 80 years old and up. Tom Brokaw called them "the greatest generation" and without putting words in Tom's mouth, my experience tells me that in part it is because they were doers – people who served others by giving of their Time.

In this Church, they have all served on Council, Altar Guild, Property, Choir, they are the Sunday school teachers, and the ones who prepare the food for families after funerals, then wash the dishes and then clean up. They come early and start the coffee and stay late to clean it up.

If I am describing you, then quit listening for just one moment – ready? They are all old and I hear them asking each other, "I don't know who is going to do this when we're gone." And it breaks my heart. If you were listening, please do not be offended. Without you and your continued donation of your Time we wouldn't be much of a church. And I hope and pray the next generations are watching and learning, because all this will be theirs, and indeed, already is.

As I mentioned in the last couple of weeks, the church is not the only institution feeling this pain. You name it, Knights of Columbus, 4-H, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Lion's Club, Rotary, the Masons, they are all feeling the apathy of the younger generations. Now it's important that these same organizations offer something of value to the younger generations, but if it is serving others through the good personal stewardship of Time, then I think they do.

To the younger generations I simply want to say, your first and last membership, your first and last calling, is ... the Church. We were here when you were baptized, and God willing and with your continued support, we will be here when you are memorialized.

I want you to enjoy your children. People always told me, they grow up so fast, then I found out that is true. But you are a living value system for your own children, and I dare say, your parents, and your grandparents raised you with the knowledge that a life of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ through the local church is the most important investment of your Time that you will ever make. Please, among the many demands on your Time, don't forget your Church.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Here is my Raisin' the Bar Challenge for you this week. Would you please pray for your Church, its vitality, and its future in all three aspects of personal stewardship. Pray that the Holy Spirit of the Living God lead you in a godly response to all three, but especially this week, pray for the Spirit's guidance on your Time. Let the living of your life, your example, be a reflection of God's goodness.

Prayer

Eternal light, shine in our hearts. Eternal wisdom, scatter the darkness of our ignorance. Eternal compassion, have mercy on us. Turn us to seek your face, and enable us to reflect your goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.