

Blindness and Sight

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Bulletin Scripture: Zechariah 9:9 MSG

“Shout and cheer, Daughter Zion! Raise your voice, Daughter Jerusalem! Your king is coming! a good king who makes all things right, a humble king riding a donkey.”

INTRODUCTION

Today, is the day we celebrate what we call Palm Sunday, the story of Jesus’ Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem with the crowds waving Palm Branches and shouting “Hosanna”. For many of you, like me, this is a familiar story, read each year as we approach Easter. It may feel as comfortable as your favorite worn in sweater, or it you may look at it like you do days old leftovers in the fridge...familiar, but not necessarily feeling any emotional attachment to it at this point.

If this is where you are today, I invite you to listen anew to the familiar story, as if for the first time. And, for those of you that this story is newer too, enjoy! I love when my “old leftovers” in the fridge become a delicious hearty meal for a friend.

For all of us, as I read this scene, picture yourself among the crowds as I read of Jesus’ Triumphal Entry.

Reading of the Triumphal Entry

Mark 11:1-10 MSG

“When they were nearing Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany on Mount Olives, he sent off two of the disciples with instructions: “Go to the village across from you. As soon as you enter, you’ll find a colt tethered, one that has never yet been ridden. Untie it and bring it. If anyone asks, ‘What are you doing?’ say, ‘The Master needs him, and will return him right away.’”

They went and found a colt tied to a door at the street corner and untied it. Some of those standing there said, “What are you doing untying that colt?” The disciples replied exactly as Jesus had instructed them, and the people let them alone. They brought the colt to Jesus, spread their coats on it, and he mounted.

The people gave him a wonderful welcome, some throwing their coats on the street, others spreading out rushes they had cut in the fields. Running ahead and following after, they were calling out, **Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in God’s name! Blessed the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in highest heaven!**”

The people in this story have listened to Jesus's teachings, seen lives healed (maybe their own), and no doubt many other miracles. They know the prophetic scriptures and have been waiting and hoping for all that is wrong to be made right. Their hope is in Jesus, whose words and actions have been demonstrating a change is coming.

For most of the Israelites, Jesus represented long awaited hope no longer deferred but soon to be realized. Jesus himself declared this to be the case.

Jesus' Inauguration Address

Luke 4:14-21 MSG

"Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. He taught in their meeting places to everyone's acclaim and pleasure.

He came to Nazareth where he had been raised. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

God's Spirit is on me; he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and **recovery of sight to the blind**, To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's time to shine!"

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."

That set everyone in the meeting place seething with anger. They threw him out, banishing him from the village, then took him to a mountain cliff at the edge of the village to throw him to his doom, but he gave them the slip and was on his way."

Unfortunately, Jesus declaring who he is and what he plans to do, was not good news to all the Israelites. Especially the religious leaders of his day. Jesus declared sight for the blind, yet it seemed that even though the religious leaders had physical sight they were spiritually blind. They just couldn't see how Jesus was who he said he was, and how he could do what he said he could do, or perhaps even feared that he might dare and cause an upset to the status quo.

But for those willingly following Jesus, prophetic passages like this one, were the phrases and images in the people's minds and hearts when Jesus comes onto the scene at the Triumphal Entry. The crowds knew the prophecies in the Scriptures of a

coming Rescuer. They were living in a time and place where the ruling empire was unjust and the religious leaders just as guilty. So when the crowds shout "Hosanna" it's not just a generalized "Praise the Lord", but literally "Save Now"

As I was preparing for this week, I stumbled upon a footnote about Bartimaeus. Growing up, he was referred to as blind Bartimaeus. Again, a familiar story in my childhood. Just another person wanting Jesus to heal him.

But there's so much more to his story and his faith, that I had never noticed before. For while many of the religious leaders of Jesus' day were spiritually blind to the truth of Jesus, Bartimaeus, blind, sitting on the side of the road begging—he saw Jesus clearly!

Reading the Story of Bartimaeus' Sight

Mark 10:46-52 MSG

"They spent some time in Jericho. As Jesus was leaving town, trailed by his disciples and a parade of people, a blind beggar by the name of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting alongside the road. When he heard that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by, he began to cry out, **"Son of David, Jesus! Mercy, have mercy on me!"** Many tried to hush him up, but he yelled all the louder, **"Son of David! Mercy, have mercy on me!"**

Jesus stopped in his tracks. "Call him over." They called him. "It's your lucky day! Get up! He's calling you to come!" Throwing off his coat, he was on his feet at once and came to Jesus. Jesus said, "What can I do for you?" The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "On your way," said Jesus. "Your faith has saved and healed you." **In that very instant he recovered his sight and followed Jesus down the road."**

In the Gospel of Mark, Bartimaeus' interaction with Jesus IMMEDIATELY proceeds Jesus' Triumphal Entry. Whether or not it actually happened RIGHT before, the author made sure to put it together. Unfortunately we may miss out on this connection because in our modern times our Bibles have chapter and verses assigned to help us reference passages. So this is at the end of Ch 10 and the Triumphal Entry is at the beginning of Ch 11. Luckily for the early church, they would not have missed this connection. And what is so significant about these two stories connected as they are? Because Bartimaeus could see BEFORE Jesus healed his physical sight. Bartimaeus knew who Jesus was when he called him "Son of David".

"Son of David"

I always thought Bartimaeus was just wanting a miracle like everyone else. That he was hoping/believing Jesus could heal him. But, I didn't realize there was any significance to

the title. I mean I know each name for God and each title bestowed on Jesus has specific reference to character revelation and prophetic scripture, but as a gentile so much just goes over my head and I miss the significance and connections. Bartimaeus is actually calling to mind several prophetic passages about the coming Savior when using the title “Son of David” to address Jesus.

Here's a few:

Jeremiah 23:5-6 NLT

“For the time is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will raise up a righteous descendant from King David’s line. **He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land.** And this will be his name: ‘The Lord Is Our Righteousness.’ In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety.

1 Kings 1:33-35 MSG

“Then [David] ordered, “Gather my servants, then mount my son Solomon on my royal mule and lead him in procession down to Gihon..anoint him king over Israel. Then blow the ram’s horn trumpet and shout, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ You will then accompany him as he enters and takes his place on my throne, succeeding me as king. I have named him ruler over Israel and Judah.”

“...[They] mounted Solomon on King David’s mule, and paraded with him to Gihon...and anointed Solomon. They blew the ram’s horn trumpet and **everyone shouted, “Long live King Solomon!” Everyone joined the fanfare, the band playing and the people singing, the very earth reverberating to the sound.**”

Zechariah 9:9-10 MSG

“Shout and cheer, Daughter Zion! Raise your voice, Daughter Jerusalem! Your king is coming! a good king who makes all things right, a humble king riding a donkey, a mere colt of a donkey. I’ve had it with war—no more chariots in Ephraim, no more war horses in Jerusalem, no more swords and spears, bows and arrows. He will offer peace to the nations, a peaceful rule worldwide, from the four winds to the seven seas.”

What the religious leaders couldn’t see, Bartimaeus proclaimed boldly. His physical condition of blindness in no way limited his spiritual sight.

In a few days time, the crowds loose the joy in continuing to follow Jesus and instead side with the religious leaders, just wanting Jesus out of the picture. The Israelites thought Jesus would physically usher in a political kingdom of peace and free them from the Roman oppression. When scuttle was that the religious leaders wanted Jesus dead, not only did his followers start to pull away, deny knowing him, but outright called for his

crucifixion. I'm guessing it was a lot like how the Israelites felt before their freedom from Egypt. They thought Moses was just making things worse for them with Pharaoh and they would be better off without his intervention.

In the Exodus story, it wasn't till they were free from Egypt's bondage that they were free to fully worship God and enter the promised land. For the people in Jesus' day, it wasn't till Jesus rises from the dead and pours out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that we see them too fully free to worship God and follow boldly.

CONCLUSION

Where are you today?

Do you come to today's celebration overwhelmed by the conditions you find yourself in? Maybe feeling a bit of cynicism, a bit jaded?

I know my idea of what it means for Jesus to be my Savior and Jesus' idea of what it means to be my Savior, just don't seem to line up very well, so much of the time. Because Jesus doesn't seem to fit what I want, it can be easier to relate to the crowds response to Jesus a few days later in the story...when they realize Jesus isn't going to save them in the way they thought.. In moments like this, it is so much easier to shout "Crucify Him!".

So, whether you came to this story today with a heart full of faith or a heart weighted by disappointments, I invite you to step into this story afresh—to immerse yourself in the story as if hearing it for the first time.

May we join with the seeing Bartimaeus, in seeing the hope of the hope, healing, and freedom Jesus brings to us.

As I re-read the section that Jesus read from Isaiah 61, I invite you to close your eyes, if you would like, and open your heart to what Jesus is proclaiming for your life:

Isaiah 61:1-7 MSG

"The Spirit of God, the Master, is on me because God anointed me. He sent me to preach good news to the poor, heal the heartbroken, Announce freedom to all captives, pardon all prisoners. God sent me to announce the year of his grace— a celebration of God's destruction of our enemies— and to comfort all who mourn,

To care for the needs of all who mourn in Zion, give them bouquets of roses instead of ashes, Messages of joy instead of news of doom, a praising heart instead of a languid spirit. Rename them "Oaks of Righteousness" planted by God to display his glory.

They'll rebuild the old ruins, raise a new city out of the wreckage. They'll start over on the ruined cities, take the rubble left behind and make it new. You'll hire outsiders to herd your flocks and foreigners to work your fields,

But you'll have the title "Priests of God," honored as ministers of our God. You'll feast on the bounty of nations, you'll bask in their glory. **Because you got a double dose of trouble and more than your share of contempt, Your inheritance in the land will be doubled and your joy will go on forever."**

As I re-read the Triumphal Entry passage, picture yourself in this crowd, alongside the seeing Bartimaeus. When we get to the part of the crowd shouting praise to Jesus, I invite you to wave a Palm branch, if you have one, and join me in unision to declare out loud our praises.

Re-Read the Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:28-34 MSG & Matthew 21:8-9 CEB

Right at the crest, where Mount Olives begins its descent, the whole crowd of disciples burst into enthusiastic praise over all the mighty works they had witnessed:

...A large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Hosanna in the highest!"