

Twentieth-Third Sunday after Pentecost, October 28, 2018, 10:00 AM at St. Thomas, Northern Cambria

The Rev. Annis Rogers

Job 38:1-7, (34-41), Psalm 104:1-9,25, 37b, Hebrews 5:1-10, Mark 10:35-45

“I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me out of all my terror.”

What a time we are living in! Such violence, such hate, such terrible pain. Pittsburgh is our neighborhood, and this senseless killing of people in the midst of prayer, in our neighborhood, is too much for us to comprehend.

Jesus asks us, “What do you want me to do for you?” Really? Isn’t it obvious? We want the senseless killing to stop. We want an end to the hatred that divides us. Jesus already knows that. But he asks us, “What do you want me to do for you?” God knows our pain, our suffering. God does not need to ask what we want. But we need to state it. We need to say it directly to God. Jesus is guiding us to articulate our desires. When we tell God in our prayers what we need, what we want, our prayers help us discern what it is we are bringing before God. In bringing our desires to God in prayer, we are acknowledging the limits of our own power, our helplessness. We sense our need to reach out to God, and we engage in the conversation of prayer. Prayer deepens our relationship to God. As we pray, the Holy Spirit gives our desires new shape, in accordance to God’s will, and we are changed.

Today we have the story of Bartimaeus, a blind man living on the edge of society. He is all but invisible to the crowd as Jesus is approaching. To the crowd Bartimaeus is a nobody. But Bartimaeus is not nobody. He is a child of God, and he loves God. Bartimaeus has heard of Jesus, the one who heals, and as Jesus nears, Bartimaeus calls out to him, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” His use of the term “Son of David” is a messianic reference. The crowd is annoyed that Bartimaeus is calling attention to himself, and they push him back and tell him to be quiet. But Bartimaeus continues to call out to Jesus, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” Jesus said, “Call him here.” Bartimaeus threw off his cloak, and he sprang toward Jesus, leaving behind his only possession, the cloak which was his means of collecting coins tossed by passers-by. Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” He answered, “Teacher, let me see again.” Without further ritual or even a touch, Jesus simply said, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately Bartimaeus received his sight, left his old life behind him, and followed Jesus. This Bartimaeus who had been blind, through faith, saw what the crowd could not.

For the past few weeks we have read excerpts from the story of Job. We have read about how Job, a righteous man, is assaulted with sores all over his body. A once wealthy man, he has lost everything, even all his sons and daughters. As he sits in his misery, Job’s friends come and sit with him in silence. Their presence is a comfort to Job. But his friends have a very orthodox understanding of suffering. They are certain that Job is suffering because he has committed great sin against God. They begin to question Job about his sin and lecture about how Job deserves his pain. Their insistence that he has done something to deserve God’s punishment is no comfort for Job. Job is confident in his innocence. Job says that if only God would meet him face to face and hear him out, God would see that Job does not deserve to suffer, and he would

be vindicated. Finally, God speaks directly to Job out of a whirlwind, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” Until now Job has asked why misfortune happens. Now through questions God leads Job to a new perspective. Job comes to understand that God is beyond knowing, the universe is beyond knowing, senseless suffering is beyond knowing. Job begins to see that he is not able or expected to understand God’s purposes. And yet, this God beyond knowing, cares for Job so much that he reveals himself personally to Job.

The stories of Job and Bartimaeus teach us about suffering, and faith in the midst of suffering. Job learns that God is beyond knowing, that senseless suffering is beyond knowing. Do not look for a reason for suffering. And Bartimaeus shows us faith within his blindness, in the midst of a crowd who are blind to faith.

We are vulnerable to suffering because we are human. As mere mortals of dust and ashes, we can never truly comprehend all of God’s ways.

Once Jesus calls us and touches us with God’s healing power, our eyes are opened and we are drawn to new life.

In these days of senseless violence, we are to seek the Lord, and he will answer us, and he will deliver us. *Amen.*