

Year B, Proper 25, 24.10.2021, Mark 10.46 - end

So you pick up your commentary or commentaries on Mark's gospel and each and every one tells you that the name Bartimæus, the blind man of today's gospel means Son of Timæus, Bar being an Aramaic word meaning Son, therefore as already stated Bartimæus means Son of Timæus. Surprisingly they don't go on to tell you that Timæus is a Latinized Greek name meaning honour. Bartimæus therefore means son of honour, which contrasts with Son of David. The mixing of a Greek name with an Aramaic prefix as in Bartimæus underlines one of the points I have been stressing over the last weeks that Jesus' healing and teaching ministry from his meeting with the Syrophenician woman onwards stretches to include the Greek diaspora that settled in the region as well as the residing population summed up by three words or phrases: the Galilee of the Gentiles, the Decapolis and Transjordan. In each of these, Jesus' ministry brings new life through teaching and healing.

Timæus as a proper name has come down to us through a dialogue written by the great Greek philosopher Plato featuring Timæus and Socrates. Quoting from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,

"In the Timæus Plato presents an account of the formation of the universe and an explanation of its impressive order and beauty. The universe, he proposes, is the product of rational, purposive, and beneficent agency. It is the handiwork of a divine craftsman ... who, imitating an unchanging and eternal model, imposes mathematical order on ... preexistent chaos to generate the ordered universe (kosmos). The governing explanatory principle of the account is teleological: the universe as a whole as well as its various parts are so arranged as to produce a vast array of good effects. For Plato this arrangement is not fortuitous, but the outcome of the deliberate intent of Intellect (nous), anthropomorphically represented by the figure of the Craftsman who plans and constructs a world that is as excellent as its nature permits it to be."

Well there you have it. By the way the title of Robert's doctoral dissertation is "Hellenistic Dimensions of the Gospel of Matthew". In today's Church there are those who want to get behind the Greek influences on our faith as handed down to us through the Nicene Creed of 325 and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed of 381, which is the creed we affirm Sunday by Sunday with the addition of what is termed the Filioque. The addition of "and the son" as in "who proceeds from the Father and the Son".

The Christian faith at its best has always sought to meet the intellectual demands of the time, be they philosophical, scientific and in these latter days sociological. To surrender our Greek/Latin heritage, the Classical heritage too easily, would be to my mind to secede too readily from the demands of intellectual rigour in our quest to know God, the God who is

beyond our imagining and our knowing, as fully as we can in this finite world. There are those in the church who are ready in each generation to call us back to a purer form as only to be found in Scripture, in the Bible. I am sympathetic in as much as a close reading of the Bible on this Bible Sunday is essential not some add-on and speaking personally enriches my faith in a way that a purely philosophical discourse cannot. Athens meets Jerusalem, Plato meets Moses, these pairings remind us that our faith as we now give expression to it is forged in the cauldron of Antiquity. Ours is a faith that is dependent on its Jewish heritage, the living God of the Covenants finding its fullest expression (revelation) in The Word made Flesh, God incarnate, while being simultaneously inspired in each generation by the giving of the Holy Spirit together with the employment of our senses and reason. This is the Anglican way, the way of Scripture, Tradition and Reason that we share with other historic churches enriching us and which many today find attractive, compelling, and are ready to take time and make an effort to explore it. It is surprising to me and I am sure to all of you that these few reflections all stem from breaking down a name into its Aramaic and its Latinized Greek parts: Bartimæus, son of honour.

Let's mine today's gospel for other names and titles. We will find a rich array for such a short reading. We are told that the person that is causing a stir amongst the crowds is Jesus of Nazareth. Immediately Bartimæus who is sitting strategically by the roadside begging for alms from the pilgrims setting out for Jerusalem shouts addressing Jesus of Nazareth. He does so the first time by simply addressing Jesus as Jesus omitting "of Nazareth", but adding significantly the title Son of David. He addresses Jesus twice calling him each time Son of David. This is the first time in Mark's gospel that Jesus is addressed as Son of David. Keep in mind the crowds. They are on their way to Jerusalem from Jericho for the keeping of the Passover festival. They have a long ascent ahead of them from Jericho 258 metres (846 ft) below sea level to Jerusalem 754 metres (2474 ft) above sea level a rise of 1012 metres (2720 ft). Many have been wondering who this Jesus of Nazareth is. Is he the Messiah? Is he the promised one? Is he one of the prophets? Is he Elijah? On hearing Bartimæus calling out using a Messianic title Jesus stops. He does not rebuke Bartimæus, but accepts the title without comment. Remember Mark's purpose has been to tell the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God from the outset: Mark verse 1, chapter 1. This acceptance is significant and if we are not well versed in the promises of God, we may fail to call to mind the Davidic promise as captured in Psalm 139.

11 The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
'One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.

12 If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I shall teach them,
their sons also, for evermore,
shall sit on your throne.'

Mark has no genealogy like Matthew and Luke who claim Joseph the husband of Mary to be descended from King David. Mark has no need of such a construct, but through Bartimæus addressing Jesus as Son of David affirms that the title is correct. Jesus silently witnesses through his acceptance of the title the Son of David that he Jesus is who Bartimæus claims him to be. He is the Son of David. He is the promised one. This title Son of David says to the people gathered that God would raise up from amongst them a person to sit on the throne of David. The title Son of David speaks of a divine promise that is now being kept some 900 hundred years later. It has been a long wait... Let's fast forward to chapter 11. There we see how Mark's gospel affirms that what took place in Jericho is affirmed in Jerusalem. The next scene in Mark's gospel is the Messianic entry into Jerusalem. The Davidic promise is being kept. How do the crowds address him? Do you remember?

'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!' (Mark 11.9b,10)

The above takes on yet another colour quoting from the Jewish Annotated Bible where one reads, "Some contemporary Jewish healers (of Jesus) healed in the name of Solomon, who was a son of David." The contrast is twofold. One Jesus does not heal in the name of anyone. He is the healer. And Son of David is a title attributed to Jesus, which the healers did not use for themselves.

Back to Bartimæus! He catches Jesus' eye. Jesus calls for him (singles him out) and then asks, "What do you want me to do for you!" He answers as a man who believes, "My Teacher!" There is a shift, which invites us to shift in turn... Not only has Bartimæus drawn closer to Jesus physically, but he has also done so personally. We have moved from the regal title of Son of David in a few sentences to an intimate relationship of teacher and disciple/follower. As Christians we are always moving from confession to belonging, from a confession which is an objective relationship to a subjective relationship/personal relationship. Many address Jesus as teacher in Mark's gospel, but it is only Bartimæus who in our English translation says, "My Teacher". Bartimæus' "My Teacher" contrasts with how the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the lone scribe all address him simply as Teacher. He is a Teacher, but not their teacher.

What has Bartimæus been asking for? In the first instance he has been begging for mercy that the Lord, the Son of David might have mercy on him. It is personal. It is not cloaked in the collective. This is reinforced by the picture of Bartimæus throwing off his cloak and standing before Jesus face to face. Jesus asks, "What can I do for you?" Bartimæus replies, "My Teacher, let me see again."

A number of questions arise for each of us as we draw to a close, fed by a close reading of God's word on this Bible Sunday. Do we know God to be a God of mercy, which is one of the fundamental characteristics of the living God as our Jewish heritage underlines. Do we know Jesus to be the promised one, the Son of David? Where are we in our relationship with God, objective truth and/or personal relationship? Can we even now detect a shift? And finally do we know what to ask for when asked, "What can I do for you?" Bartimæus knew. Immediately he regains his sight and follows Jesus on the way. Going with Jesus as a follower, another Markan motif, and the throng of pilgrims he ascends to Jerusalem. Jerusalem the city of peace that receives Jesus as the one who comes in the name of the Lord, as the one who inaugurates the coming of the kingdom of our ancestor David. Jerusalem that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent... but as Jesus says in John's gospel, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Jesus, Son of David. Our teacher! To him be glory in the Church and in our lives!

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