



Week 3 – Mark 8:22 – 10:52 On the Way”

Sunday, 20th June, 2021

led by Lorraine Hawkins and Stuart Green

I want you to come with me on a journey – with Jesus and his disciples. It is Jesus’ final journey – travelling north from Bethsaida to the villages around Caesarea Philippi, then ‘up a high mountain’ (which may have been either Mount Hermon, north of Caesarea Philippi, or Mount Tabor, well south of Capernaum – experts differ on this!). They then travel to Capernaum, where Jesus had made his home, and turn south, cross the Jordan (because, we are told, Jesus was refused permission to enter Samaria) and then it’s back across the Jordan to Jericho and on the way towards his final destination – Jerusalem.

The departure from Caesarea Philippi is not just the turning point in Jesus’ and the disciples’ physical journey, and it is also a spiritual turning point. When they reach Jerusalem, Jesus will declare himself openly as the Messiah, which precipitates the events leading to his arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection.

The section of Mark we are looking at today begins and ends with Jesus healing a blind man, with a variety of stories in between.

Call to Worship

Some words from the book of Revelation, chapter 4:

*Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, who is, and who is to come.*

*Our Lord and God! You are worthy
to receive glory, honour and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were given existence
and life.*

Righteous, faithful, loving, gracious and merciful Lord,

we come to you just as we are,
gathered in this building and at home,
unified in our desire to honour you.
Help us to worship you as we ought.

Amen.

HYMN: STF 175 Light of the world you stepped down into darkness

Light of the world

You stepped down into darkness

Opened my eyes, Let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore you

Hope of a life spent with you

Here I am to worship

Here I am to bow down

Here I am to say that you're my God

You're altogether lovely

Altogether worthy

Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days

So highly exalted

Glorious in heaven above

Humbly you came to the earth you created

All for love's sake became poor

(Chorus)

Tim Hughes

Prayers

Dear Lord God,

We thank you for so many good things:

- For the amazing world you have created, and all of the amazing plants and animals.
- For sunny days, sunsets and refreshing rain showers.
- For people who love us and care for us, especially families, friends and neighbours.

- And for much more (spend a few moments thinking about other things you are thankful for)
- And most of all, we thank you for your Son, Jesus, who lived a human life, died and rose again, defeating death and bringing us hope.

We also want to say sorry for the times when we've stopped thinking about God and have done selfish things.

When we say sorry to God, we hear his amazing words of grace: our sins are forgiven.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name,

your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

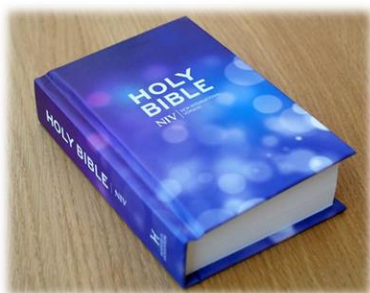
Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,

now and for ever. **Amen**



First Reading – Mark 8:22-26

²² They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?"

²⁴ He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around."

²⁵ Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

Jesus heals a blind man

Maybe Jesus' question in last week's readings, "Do you have eyes but fail to see..." (Mark 8:18) explains why Jesus healed the blind man at Bethsaida in two stages. The disciples are literally on a journey with Jesus, and the restoration of the man's blindness in stages demonstrates that they – and we – are on a journey. For many of us, our coming to faith is a journey – it doesn't all happen at once. Jesus gave the blind man his sight, but in contrast, the disciples didn't gain their spiritual sight – not yet – although they were gradually getting closer- in stages.

Second Reading – Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."

So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

⁵¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

⁵² "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Jesus heals a second blind man

At the end of the section of Mark we are exploring today is another, quite different healing of a blind man – blind Bartimaeus. Jesus and his disciples stopped at Jericho, about 16 miles from Jerusalem, and on their way out they were passing a blind man sitting by the road, begging – Bartimaeus – one of the few people healed by Jesus who is named.

Bartimaeus hears a noisy crowd of people coming, he asks what is happening, and when he's told it's Jesus, he shouts out. He won't be quiet! He's desperate for Jesus' touch on his life. When Jesus calls him, he jumps up and throws off his cloak (which is very valuable – people throw coins in it, it's his blanket, his only protection from the weather).

Amidst the noise of the crowd, Jesus hears the cry of this beggar, and stops in his tracks. His ears are attuned to hear the marginal person. Jesus reaches out with authority to include powerless, vulnerable people, modelling authentic Christian ministry.

Jesus asks Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" That may seem rather an unnecessary question to us – of course he wants his sight! But giving up begging would mean living differently, working instead of sitting by the road begging – a challenge! Bartimaeus rises to the challenge brilliantly – he wants new life – unlike the disciples – when Jesus asks them, as you will be reading this week in chapter 10 – they want power, prestige, glory!

When Jesus has healed Bartimaeus, unlike previous occasions, he doesn't tell Bartimaeus not to tell anyone, just as he hasn't rebuked Bartimaeus for calling him 'son of David'. He is ready to enter Jerusalem—ready to confront the religious establishment—ready to die. He has started
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on the last leg of his journey.....!! but you'll hear about that in next week's exciting instalment! And Bartimaeus? He joins the crowd following Jesus along the road,

You've read the two stories of blind men being healed, but were the disciples being healed of their blindness? Well, we shall see – if you'll excuse the pun!

Hymn: Open our eyes Lord

Open our eyes Lord
We want to see Jesus
To reach out and touch Him
And say that we love Him

Open our ears Lord
And Help us to listen
Open our eyes Lord
We want to see Jesus

Robert Cull.

Lack of understanding

When I was at school, studying maths for 'O level' (GCSE for you young ones! – the system changed in 1986) our teacher never explained the point of algebra and trigonometry, which probably contributed to my struggle to understand them. Her favourite phrase – and one of my main memories of schooldays, was, "Can you not see, girls? Can you not see?" Well no, I couldn't. I was good at arithmetic, brilliant at mental arithmetic thanks to my parents who were also brilliant at it, but how I managed to get an O level in maths I'll never know! At least I knew I didn't understand! But there are times when we don't know we don't understand.

Some of the time, the disciples knew they didn't understand Jesus... they asked each other, "What kind of man is this?" Occasionally he explained something they didn't understand, such as the parable of the sower, but more often than not he left the disciples – and other people – to think about

what he'd said and work it out for themselves. Quite a 'modern' teaching method!

Going back to maths teachers, I remember that, in some of our maths books, the answers were given at the back of the book, but, when doing your homework, it was no good just looking up the answer and putting that down – you had to show you had worked it out for yourself – because that was the only way you could learn.

What happens between the two healings

Mark's Gospel seems like a random collection of stories, but I think he deliberately placed these two stories of the healing of blind men at either end of a group of stories of Jesus' teaching, revelation, and another miracle. All these you will be reading this week. Mark shows the disciples' blindness being gradually healed – although it wouldn't be for a little while yet – after Jesus' resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that their blindness would be fully healed and they would fully understand.

On the way Jesus is in no doubt that there is little time left to him to teach the disciples everything they need to know – about love, justice, servanthood..., and to prepare them for his death and resurrection, so we can assume that what he taught them was very important. His miracles, that the disciples had just witnessed, were signs of what Jesus' kingdom is about, but they still didn't get it, and it's URGENT THAT THEY UNDERSTAND. Hostility is growing and it's vital that the disciples realise now who Jesus really is, what he's doing and why. Jesus' mission, as he heads for Jerusalem, is to challenge the heart of the system. The disciples won't be willing and able to continue his work if they don't understand that he isn't just a healer, isn't just a prophet, but something much more.

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Jesus tells his disciples three times of his coming death but they respond to each of these predictions inappropriately, showing that, after all they have heard and seen, they are spiritually blind to the future that Jesus is seeking to reveal to them. When will they ever understand?

Again, on the way, Jesus has asked the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" and Peter has answered, "You are the Messiah." Wonderful! The penny has finally dropped, and they now know who he is! So, all is well, then? Well, not quite. Peter hasn't fully understood – his partial insight is reminiscent of the blurred vision of the blind man Jesus had just healed, and shows he needs another divine touch. The disciples know who Jesus is, but they don't really know what it means for him or, for that matter, for themselves.

So next on the way we have the amazing Transfiguration or Transformation of Jesus. For this, he singles out his inner circle—Peter, James, and John—for special attention. Jesus' transfiguration is incredibly spectacular and you'd think that this, if nothing else would lead the disciples' to understand who Jesus is, what he is doing and what is about to happen. Clearly, so far, they haven't understood what they have witnessed, so this amazing lesson is needed.

Jesus was caught up with, bathed in, the love, power and kingdom of God, so it transforms his whole being with light a sign that he is the Messiah. He is the Light of the World, sent into our darkness. And God says Jesus is his son. God says, 'Listen to him'. But still they don't get it!

How this applies to our lives

Blindness and deafness are ways we use to describe lack of understanding. Are we 'blind', like the disciples, as Jesus tries to teach us? We need to ask the Holy Spirit to

open our eyes and our ears in order that we might hear, see and understand.

How did Jesus feel when the disciples didn't understand? How does he feel about us when we don't understand? Is he exasperated? Well, that's a human emotion. He knows in advance, so he's not surprised or disappointed in us... he never stopped loving his disciples, despite their failure and cowardice – he sent his Holy Spirit and used them to build his church. He will do the same for us!

If you don't understand, have doubts or don't feel you're good enough, never doubt that God loves you anyway. Trying to work things out for ourselves, or listening to other people (who may well have widely varying opinions!) isn't the answer – as I've often heard said, the answer to everything is Jesus – through his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will overcome our pre-conceived ideas and show us something different, something bigger and greater. And remember that we have two advantages over the disciples – the Holy Spirit and that great gift, hindsight!

QUESTIONS

Mark's Gospel is so sparsely written, that it leaves us with many questions. Your weekly reading plans ask you questions about the text each day, but I want to ask you even more questions – questions that challenge me about my response to what I have read.

- Who do we say Jesus is? - a great human teacher? a 'superman'? or someone who is Lord of all and to whom we commit our lives?
- How do we see Jesus? Do we create him in our own image? limit him? put him safely in a box? shape him to our liking to make him convenient to obey or ignore? mould him to fit our expectations, desires and circumstances?

- Bartimaeus was desperate for Jesus to stop and heal him – how desperate are we?
- Are our eyes (and ears) open to see (and hear) what Jesus is saying to us?
- Do we understand what Jesus is doing right now, not only in our own lives, but in our world?
- What do we want Jesus to do for us? Let's make that more personal – what do you want Jesus to do for you?
- Where are you 'on the way'? Can you help others as they are 'on the way'?
- Have you asked Jesus to step into your life and open your eyes so that you can see him?

And remember:

- Jesus still heals today!!
- As our final hymn will ask us shortly:
*Will You Use The Faith You've Found
To Reshape The World Around,
Through My Sight And Touch And Sound
In You And You In Me?*

Prayers

For our prayers, I invite you to use a small piece of foil. A couple of inches square should be fine.

1. Hold the piece of foil and look at the shiny side. Say thank you to God for good things in your life and for things that you like doing.



2. Loosely crumple the foil into a ball (don't make it too tight or you won't be able to straighten it out!)



Think about people who find life tough: people who are ill, tired, lonely, sad and afraid. Ask God to help them and be with them.

3. Smooth the ball out so that the foil is back into a square (or as close as possible). Thank



God for people who help others when they need it - parents, teachers, medical staff, friends and any others. Pray that God will bless these people and pray that we will also be people who help others and show them love.

4. Mould the foil into the shape of...

- the initial letter of the name of someone or somewhere you'd like to pray for



- or a shape that symbolises something you'd like to pray for.

Hold the shape and ask God to help and bless that person/place/situation.

Amen

673 Will you come and follow me

Will You Come And Follow Me
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Go Where You Don't Know
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Let My Love Be Shown,
Will You Let My Name Be Known,
Will You Let My Life Be Grown
In You And You In Me?

Will You Leave Yourself Behind
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Care For Cruel And Kind
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Risk The Hostile Stare
Should Your Life Attract Or Scare?
Will You Let Me Answer Prayer
In You And You In Me?

Will You Let The Blinded See
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Set The Prisoners Free
And Never Be The Same?

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Will You Kiss The Leper Clean,
And Do Such As This Unseen,
And Admit To What I Mean
In You And You In Me?

Will You Love The 'You' You Hide
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Quell The Fear Inside
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Use The Faith You've Found
To Reshape The World Around,
Through My Sight And Touch And Sound
In You And You In Me?

Lord, Your Summons Echoes True
When You But Call My Name.
Let Me Turn And Follow You
And Never Be The Same.
In Your Company I'll Go
Where Your Love And Footsteps Show.
Thus I'll Move And Live And Grow
In You And You In Me.

John L Bell & Graham Maule

Blessing

May God, who works miracles in our lives,
fill us with his Spirit,
and change us day by day to reflect his glory,
until that day when we see him face to face.

And the blessing of God the Father
God the Son
and God the Holy Spirit
be with us all now and ever more.



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