



Staff Dedication Service 2017

Seize the day!

Mark 10:46-52

As we begin the new year, I turn to a significant account in Mark's gospel. It comes at the end of a section which covers chapters 9 and 10. This has often been best described as a travel narrative, beginning with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi and ending on an encouraging note.

It could be said to transition from the Galilee ministry into the City of Jerusalem. Both these contexts for the ministry of Jesus are critical in understanding just who he is and what he is about.

I have given this address the title "Seize the Day!" The words 'Carpe Diem' come from the pen of Roman poet, Horace. They encourage us to enjoy, seize, use and make use of the opportunity as it presents itself to us. They seem highly appropriate as we step into the opening and challenges of a new year – 2017.

Bartimaeus may well have had that feeling that life was passing him by ... literally. He was sitting by the road begging; perhaps he had sat there on a regular basis and it may have been "his spot". However, inside Bartimaeus something new was about to occur and he was getting ready to seize the moment that would change his life irrevocably. This suggests a situation which could not be revoked or repealed and the change that comes through the gift of sight gladly will be permanent.

Mark 10:46-52 records that day as Jesus enters the city of Jericho. I offer these thoughts as a pattern for growth as an organisation.

This is the last miracle before Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem. It has much to say to us and at the heart of Wesley Mission. We have begun a journey of growth and in the widest sense we reach out to those who are in greatest need in our community.

Bartimaeus was not the only beggar on the road, I suspect. If it was Passover time, and there is reason to suppose it was, the streets would be busy. This may well have been Bartimaeus' patch but it would become a place of transformation. In Matthew's account, two were healed, with Bartimaeus being the prominent one.

He could have accepted his situation as final and beyond any sense of healing and change, but he did not. He was not satisfied spending his time by the roadside, for he wanted to see again. There are number of things which need to occur for him and for ourselves if we are going to seize the day of our opportunity.

Bartimaeus and we need to:-

Articulate what our desire is

Out-shout those who would discourage us

Move forward to accept the call to change

Be open to all that faith can do for us in this and all situations

ARTICULATE WHAT OUR DESIRE IS – v.47



Jesus is surrounded by his chosen first team of disciples and other followers as he quickly passes through Jericho. He wants to continue his journey but he is buffered by people who want to be identified with him for a wide variety of different reasons.

The setting is helpful to our understanding. Jesus has just been telling the disciples through the mistaken purposes of James and John that the first must become last and this would be a far cry from the attitudes of those in the crowd.

There must have been some kind of commotion to enable the blind beggar to realise that it was Jesus who was passing by:-

Had he heard others talk about him?

Did he know others who had been healed?

Was this his moment to seize the day?

Bartimaeus did not simply want to stay at the place where he felt his need; he needed to do something about it and to articulate that need. This operates at an individual level when we overcome self-consciousness and reach out to express our need.

We confess the need and desire to change

We allow heart, will and mind to connect

We move from confession to faith

This past week I have met with close to 60 staff who have been exploring not only what our plans for growth would look like for us, but also how to gain the confidence to step out and reach out in faith.

The healing of Bartimaeus reveals to us Jesus' response to those in need. It is a metonym for what Jesus Christ is always doing.

The Bartimaeus story serves as the concluding bookend to a wider section in which blindness in the broadest sense appears to be a unifying theme.

Earlier in Mark 8, Jesus restores the sight of a blind man at Bethsaida and in Chapters 9 and 10 he confronts spiritual blindness amongst his closest followers, who seem either unwilling or unable to accept the radical claims of God's in-breaking kingdom.

Of course it is wonderful to read the great stories of entrepreneurs like of Michael Dell, who created a computer empire in his college dormitory. However, for me one of the marvellous stories I have encountered is that of Professor Graeme Clark, who I interviewed on Wesley Impact.

His great desire to develop the cochlear implant began with small boys laughing at his father's inability to hear what was being said in the small shop they ran. Graeme was motivated by enormous professional skill and deep compassionate concern for those who could not hear.

OUT-SHOUT THOSE WHO WOULD DISCOURAGE US – v.48

Bartimaeus' desire for healing was very nearly sabotaged by those shouting him down. The blind man, however, refused to allow that to happen – and he shouted all the more. Resistance can come from all directions. The cry of Bartimaeus is not just urgent, but earnest.



Bartimaeus doesn't have anyone to introduce him. His credentials are simply those of need and make a vital link with the kind of context in which we minister today in a 21st century Sydney.

We often have to out-shout discouragement – at a personal level and in the setting of the wider community.

We have to discover who our encouragers are. Jesus stopped the Jerusalem-bound pilgrimage and said, "Call him." (v.49) Jesus often has time for those others reject. That has a powerful message for all of us.

Soon the desire of those in the crowd who wanted to shut Bartimaeus down (v.48) is turned into something different. Put simply, their "Shut up" becomes a "Cheer up". Discouragers can be transformed by the power of God and they become encouragers. Bartimaeus moves from his place by the roadside into direct contact with God in Christ.

We release people to be all that they can be, through God, through discovering the power to encourage. We notice in the passage that Jesus "stopped" and this gave him time to reach out to the one in need.

I recall what Jerome said in relation to encouragement being a major area of our service and mission: "Correction does much, but encouragement does more ... encouragement after censure is as the sun after a shower."

Encouragement is important in every area. It is as we are persistent in our following Jesus and reaching out to those in need that we find clarified for ourselves the things that are most important.

Brexit and the events in North America leave many people feeling despondent and disappointed, but you cannot change history – you have to work through it to make things better.

I was in New Zealand when the latest list of the most unaffordable cities to live in across the world was published. Auckland reached No 4 and Sydney No 2. Our concern is not just the value of houses, but those who will never be able to contemplate even modest rented accommodation.

Bartimaeus' lack of sight would prevent him working and actively participating in his community. He didn't even have the "Big Issue" to sell. He had to articulate his desire above the clamour of many voices.

MOVE FORWARD TO ACCEPT THE CALL TO CHANGE – v.50

Jesus is not very engaged with the crowd, apart from calling them to enable the blind man to come to him. It would be so easy to listen to the negatives rather than to rise above all the distractions.

For the blind man to receive his sight, he had to be prepared to respond with immediacy. We are told that he threw off his cloak, jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. There is an urgency in this blind man.



It is difficult for some people to respond in a way that brings about healing. I recall spending four days in the 1980s living in a block of apartments in the centre of Johannesburg. For me it was not just an experience of encountering racial inequality, bearing in mind that I was living in an illegal area because of the then Group Areas Act, but I also encountered poverty in its rawness. Fires in the street to keep people warm and shop windows boarded up meant people had to huddle together for survival.

Ralph McTell wrote the powerful song, “The Streets of London”. In it he described the different aspects of poverty, including the man in the all-night café and the woman “carrying her world in two carrier bags”. We see such people every day.

Whenever we have the homeless street count here in Sydney, I am saddened at the growing number of people who live without accommodation at the heart of our highly sophisticated city. It is the flip-side of the stories that refer to Sydney being the second most expensive city in the world. Far too many people are very aware of what this means for them.

When we talk about seizing the day, we have to consider what rising to the opportunity of the moment means. There are two kinds of opportunities, according to an old Japanese saying: Those we chance upon and those we create. Either kind may represent the opportunity of a lifetime to any one individual, but we are far more likely to recognise and take advantage of those we create.

Lord Reith, who was a major part of the BBC’s history, once said, “I do not like crises; but I like the opportunities they supply.”

The question that Jesus asks Bartimaeus is so obvious, “What do you want me to do for you?” How could anyone have missed the need? But there was a reason why Jesus asked this:-

It was like the woman who met a friend whose arm was in a plaster and she says, “Is there anything wrong with your arm?” Of course something is wrong with her arm. Or the man whose legs were jutting out from underneath his car and a neighbour asked, “Is anything wrong with your car?” As if he had gone under there to get out of the rain! Of course there’s something wrong with his car.

Jesus’ question gives this blind man the opportunity to express his need. Here is a man who needs to make the all-important move.

OPEN TO ALL THAT FAITH CAN DO FOR US IN THIS AND ALL SITUATIONS – v.52

The blind man responded to Jesus and said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” What then happens is that Jesus gives him the reason why he has been healed: “Go, your faith has healed you.”



There is a creative power in the words and works of Jesus – and the words of Jesus create new sight. There are six occasions in the gospels in which our Lord is reported to have given sight to the blind – and we can draw from these incidents:-

- Healing precedes an instruction to “Go”
- Obedience is a consequence of Christian healing
- We cannot avoid the demands of Jesus Christ

Obedience to God prevents us from slipping from him. I recall the story of a policeman who noticed a small boy with a lot of stuff packed on his back, riding his tricycle round and round the block. Finally, he asked him where he was going. “I’m running away from home,” the small boy answered. The policeman then asked him, “Why do you keep going round and round the block then?” The boy answered, “Mum, won’t let me cross the street.”

There are natural parameters to our living which give shape and purpose to our mission. We live gladly and freely in obedience to God.

God’s blessing is appropriately linked to faithfulness, fellowship and witness. We notice that the final words in this section have a great deal to say to us: “Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.”

- Bartimaeus chose to follow without instruction
- He became a living document of new life in Christ
- Bartimaeus had seized his opportunity of the moment

What does it mean for us to seize the day? It will mean giving ourselves the space to build a platform of services that are able to respond to the growing needs of a modern Australia. This will certainly mean applying our services in a way that impacts appropriately those we serve in relation to an increasing empowerment model of care!

How many of you have had the experience of having a neighbouring house either built or greatly extended, which overlooks where you live? This has been our recent experience. My joy has been to go up to the office at 7.30 on a Friday morning to work. Over the last few months this has been accompanied by the music of demolition and drills.

As the house is located on a route I often use when exercising, in early December I was delighted to see the family who are extending this house, standing at their gate. So I introduced myself and then after a few moments of conversation I asked the all-important question. “When do you think it will be finished?” The answer I was given was – “August”! I tried not to express too much dismay when given this answer.

It takes time to achieve anything, but what matters is that we make a start – for only in doing this can the significant changes that have to occur come to fruition. As I consider the progress at Wesley Mission at this point in time, it is clear that we are making significant headway, but there is so much more that will now need to happen.

Bartimaeus in one sense is a model of discipleship, because he is a person of faith. His capacity in his new gift of sight and his ability to comprehend is in contrast to the disciples who often did not perceive or understand. I am invited, through the words of Jesus, to see the relationship between faith and wholeness. These elements are powerfully combined to bring healing and purpose.



- Faith is the insight
- Salvation is the result
- Discipleship is the way

Our response of faith as an organisation is critical, as we follow Jesus along the road and bring hope and matching purpose to our community today.