

Proper 25 Year B

There was a sudden bump upstairs... and then a shriek. We rushed upstairs and there on the floor of the landing was our daughter Katie.... She had broken her foot while dancing in her room (something she did a lot of)... She was eight years old.... And wouldn't you know that we were taking a family trip to Washington D.C. the coming Friday... So, despite the crisis, we departed that Friday morning early... all five of us... Katie in a cast... The first day we were there we were getting ready to take the metro train into the city.... The platform was crowded; and we were about to board the train...Somewhere in the crowd, a small voice cried out... I was busy hurrying the children to the doors of the car when Katie yelled.... "That boy is being left behind!" I hurried her along and said that I was sure his mother was nearby... The boy couldn't have been more than three or four... but she insisted with an authoritative voice.... "No, we have to help him." Sure enough, all the doors to the train closed and the little boy was there all alone on the platform.... We hurried to him... He was about to panic. I went to find a transit official while Katie, in a wheelchair, and Katharine, calmed the boy down... "You'll be O.K." Katie told him... "We'll find your mama"... Sure enough the transit officials knew how to handle such matters, and they called ahead to the next stop. We accompanied the little boy on the next train... and his mother was waiting for him frantically on the platform at the next station... It all happened in a flash... in a particular moment amid the randomness of humanity.

In our gospel reading for today we find Jesus on his way to Jerusalem; fate haven taken hold... The air is electric.... Jesus has been teaching along the way... and Jericho is the last stop before climbing some 3000 feet up to Jerusalem... by now in Mark's narrative, the crowds around Jesus have picked up... the word is out about this preacher from Galilee... some were thinking that he would lead a revolt against the Roman occupiers... most followed him because he spoke with artful authority... and he had a decided gift for healing... the crowds were in a frenzy as Jesus and his disciples left Jericho for Jerusalem... they jostled for his attention... they wanted something of what he had... this speaker of truth... this one the demons knew by name... this one who crossed the boundaries of social convention in the name of love.

And then Jesus stood still, we are told.... Because he had heard a wrong voice cry out ... a wrong voice, but true... The crowd tries to shoo the voice away... but the blind beggar insists on an audience... and Jesus calls him... tells him to

stand up... and the man is told to take heart... to take heart... literally translated to take courage. And we are told that he was immediately healed, and that he followed Jesus on the way.

Alas, we only have two more readings in Mark as year B of the lectionary comes to a close. The first Sunday of Advent we'll begin our readings in Luke... so let's review one more time the main points in this gospel of Mark... You remember no doubt that this gospel is a narrative about what it means to be the baptized... Jesus the model... The chief, unifying theme being that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve... that worldly power is corrupt and abusive and violent, and that it denigrates and shames... that self-interest as an end unto itself robs the dignity of the less privileged... and that in God's world true power is found in sacrifice and self-giving; that God's power given for the sake of the good transforms and renews and restores... and that no manner of evil, no powers or principalities, can stand against it.

Now as a philosophy that is all well and good... But Mark is speaking not of a philosophy but of a practice here... a practical means by which God's power of love is let loose in the world... there is no magic to it, nothing supernatural... In fact, this life of God, this life of the Spirit in our world happens in the mundane, in the particular... amid the randomness of human commerce... in the every day.

In our gospel reading today, the lynchpin of the story is the moment in the midst of all the energy of the moment... Jesus stands still... Jesus stops to pay attention... I think Mark is being instructive here... At the heart of the practice of the faith is the art of paying attention... prayer if you will... prayer being the art of paying attention... The Buddhists call it mindfulness... the Hebrew scribes of Proverbs call it the way of Wisdom... that is why indifference is our mortal enemy... because indifference doesn't demand our attention... And if we're not paying attention, we can't act.

And not only is this gospel about the identity of the baptized, but it is also about the authority of the baptized as well... The baptized who are people of conscience... people who pay attention to their world... people who strive to see the world through the eyes of God... people who seek to love as God loves; who seek to act on God's behalf... such a life bears authority... Authority being: of the source... speaking from our true nature... that has energy, authority... that has resonance... and there is another authority of which Mark speaks... an authority often ignored... and that is the authority of the lost, the blind, the beat down... the authority of the ones shamed and bullied, and ignored... The authority of the

victims of indifference... That voice has resonance too... Blind Bartimaeus cries out with the authority of the lost... he cries from the depths... and there is no way Jesus won't hear it... Why?... Because he is paying attention.... Bartimaeus cries out like that lost little boy in the train station... and one who was paying attention heard him... and bid him take heart. That is not magic... that is redeeming power found in the love of God.

This gospel is only 16 chapters and it rushes inexorably to the cross... only to find no one in the empty tomb other than a young man telling the second hand news of the resurrection... pointing the way for the terrified disciples to Galilee... pointing the way back into the randomness of humanity... back into the everyday wherein, for Mark, life is shot through with resurrection appearances... Our reading today is one such example... the blind man is told to *stand up*... the root word in the Greek for resurrection.... To stand up and take heart and experience the healing power of God's love... This is Resurrection that is real and resonant in the randomness of the human enterprise; present in the day to day... That is our charge brothers and sisters... to hear the voice of the wounded and the lost... to pay attention to the ones absent from God's table of plenty... and to bid them stand up and take heart.... Our charge is to give account of the hope that is within us.... That is what resurrection life is.... plain, mundane, and simple... that we are all meant to stand restored... with hope and courage and dignity.... Stand still....in the random particular of humanity, stand still..... Pay attention...