

Proper 25 Year B

“Jesus stood still, and said, “call him here.”

Some of you may disagree, but raising children is a daunting challenge (show of hands)...and I've come to understand that the task doesn't necessarily end when they reach the age of 21...the ups and downs just get bigger. I would not dare choose who was the most difficult among our children...they of course are different and have their own distinct issues, and of course they have their good sides (and we love them dearly)...but when it comes to pulling out your hair, as opposed to grinding your teeth, or shaking one's head, our daughter Katie wins the prize...let us say she grew up with decidedly creative defiance...I could tell you stories, but I'm sure some of you could too...and thankfully Katie has settled down, gotten a good job and is to be married in the Spring to a young man we like.

Despite her stubbornness and her impish ways since birth, she has always been the most generous of our children...and she has always been one of the most loyal persons to her friends, and she has always been compassionate...throughout her various crises in her growing up, she never lost those qualities and it gave Katharine and me something to hold on to during her difficult years.

I remember once on a family trip to Washington D.C. Katie was probably eight or nine years old. We were boarding a train to head into the Capitol Mall...there were lots of people all around, and I was hurrying us along on the platform to make sure we caught the train...I had decided that we would be at the Smithsonian at nine o'clock, so, by gosh, we were going to be there at nine o'clock...one of my character quirks...the doors to the car were about to close...and somehow Katie saw a little boy standing outside the car behind us amid the crowd, crying and calling for his mother. He couldn't have been older than three or four...and she cried out to us, STOP... she said look, he's being left behind...being in the hurry that I was...I told her, Oh I'm sure his mother is nearby...and with the authority of Melchizedek...she shouted, NO, we're going to see about him...the train doors closed in unison and sure enough, the little boy was left alone in his terror there on the subway platform.

Katie happened to be in a wheelchair because she had broken her foot dancing a couple of weeks before...but she led the way quickly to the stricken child. We calmed him down and found a station attendant who said he'd call ahead. He knew how to handle such matters...and we assured the little boy he would find his mother.

I want to name this story a story of prayer, not what we generally think prayer is, asking with folded hands, something of God...not that we don't all do that from time to time...but this story is a story of living prayer, which fits with my definition of prayer...and that is prayer being the art of paying attention...and then perhaps a corollary, that we act upon that which we see...prayer the practice of the art of paying attention and then mustering the courage to act upon what we discern we must do.

The story in today's gospel is very similar to the one I just told you. Jesus is among a boisterous crowd, jockeying for a glimpse of this rising star of a prophet...there is one in the crowd, a blind beggar, one of the lost who cries out for help...the crowd, the many, tries to hush him up, but he cries louder...and we are told Jesus stood still...an act of prayer, paying attention to one of the many in the most need...The man is told to stand up (again as is common in Mark the root word for resurrection appears, stand up, *egero*; here another resurrection appearance... to stand with dignity, the literal definition of resurrection) He tells Jesus he wishes to see again, and Jesus tells the man that because of his faith he is healed...and we are told he followed Jesus on the Way.

So resurrection life is being restored through prayer, prayer the way I've defined it here, restored to health, restored to safety, and most of all restored to dignity...I suspect the man's poverty was directly due to his blindness...His cries of despair were unheeded until one filled with compassion stood still, paid attention and acted on it.

As in all the gospels Jesus is the archetype of who we are as the people of God...we are living prayer sent into the world with the eyes and ears of compassion to heal and restore the lost, the outcast among us...to restore their citizenship in the commonweal of God in which all have dignity and well being. The blind Beggar named Bartimaeus was shunned from such citizenship because of his low estate, but he brought through faith his need to speech, so that this man of compassion might hear him and through love restore him...so prayer becomes a two way street...that being the hope and faith of a world in dire need that there is a way towards restoration, and finding the courage of bringing such hope to speech...and then those who practice the art of discovering such need, standing still so that we might see the needs before us and acting upon them...prayer seen this way is the central dynamic of the human community living as God would have us live.

The notion of bringing needs to speech is the lynchpin here. I'm thinking of the elimination of Apartheid in South Africa, Gandhi's movement for an unoccupied India...the Civil rights movement in the fifties and sixties in our own country.....bringing to speech in an enlightened and

dare I say a Spirit filled way in each of these examples ...and the ones paying attention to the moral imperatives contained in such speech complete the dialectic that changes the world....so prayer a dialectic of compassion and need empowered by God's very breath bringing to speech that to which we must pay attention...and then the courage to act. Prayer is to enact God's healing and liberating presence in our world. And sometimes we must endeavor to empower, stand in solidarity with those who haven't mustered the courage for authoritative speech.... Prayer is the way we live and it encompasses our waking and sleeping.

That's what I mean by living prayer...when we bless our meals we give thanks for food that will empower us for God's service...which is the reason we exist....Let us listen for the voices that cry out for solace and justice and nurture and safety and dignity...let us stand still enough to hear the cries of God's own children exiled from the gracious commonweal of God....let us discern the needs also of the voiceless...Let us be living prayer with the authority of Melchizedek so that the world will forever be in the process of being restored, becoming whole, being made right...the way God intended it in the beginning....Let us unfold our hands and open them prayerfully to the world....we open them in compassion, hands of living prayer for the saving good that flows through them by the power of the Spirit so that we may stand still... and call them here..