

27th October 2024 – Morning Service

Olwen Meller

Call to Worship

In today's Gospel reading we meet a blind man by the name of Bartimaeus. When he met Jesus he said "Lord, that I may see." This is a prayer we can make our own, because in some ways we too are blind and it seems that at times we prefer blindness to seeing. We need to ask God to forgive our wilful blindness and to help us see better.

StF 8 – God with us Creator, Father

- 1) God with us: Creator, Father,
Bringing everything to birth;
Mother of the whole creation,
Fire of stars and life of earth:
Down the countless years composing,
From the earth's evolving night,
Love's response to love, and forming
Mind and soul to seek your light.
- 2) God with us: Redeemer, Brother,
Friend for ever at our side,
Here, in flesh, you walked among us,
Taking up your cross, you died.
Crucified, despised, rejected,
Perfect Love, who shared our shame,
Streaming from the cross, your judgement,
Full of mercy, clears our name.
- 3) God with us: Unwearied Spirit,
From the birth of time and space,
Surging through unconscious being,
Joyful, Life-Creating Grace:
Through the centuries you find us;
You, as God, inspire our prayer;
Life and Power at work within us,
Love for ever, everywhere!
- 4) God, Transcendent, far beyond us,
Closest Friend, unfailing Guide:
Through the ages, wronged, affronted,
In your poor, still crucified!
God with us: convict, forgive us;
By your holy love destroy
All that hinders peace and justice:
Fill this aching world with joy!

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Opening Prayers

Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, source of every blessing and giver of every good gift, we worship and adore you and bless your holy name. We praise you for the revelation of yourself in our Lord Jesus Christ, and every glimpse we have of your nature. May our love and worship of you so fill our lives that we show you forth to others. We praise you for all the joys of life, and the everyday blessings which we receive from you. May we in turn be a source of blessing to all with whom we come into contact. Lord God, you have taught us in your Word that we are members of the one Body of Christ, each with a place to fill and a function to perform. In the work that you have given us to do, enable us by your grace to make our various contributions humbly and unselfishly, to work in love and harmony with one another, and to serve your honour and not our own, in the name of Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Forgive us merciful God, for the sins which have so laid hold on us, that we no longer confess them to be sins. Let your Spirit enlighten us, your love cleanse us and your grace strengthen us. Please forgive us for those times when we have been insensitive, inconsiderate, sinful and un-Christlike in our treatment of other people. Please help always to see other people as being made in your image, unique, special and of immeasurable value. Please help us to reflect that truth in the way we act in society, and the way we use our time, our energy and our possessions. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

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.**

Reading: Job 42:2-6

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."

StF 104 – God moves in a mysterious way

- 1) God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
- 2) Come all you saints, fresh courage take
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
- 3) Judge not the Lord by feeble sense
But trust him for his grace
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
- 4) His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.
- 5) Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

William Cowper

Reading: Mark 10:46-52

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. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

First Reflection - Mark 10:46-52

In Biblical times blindness was very common due to poor hygiene and lack of medical care. Today we have eliminated many of the diseases that cause blindness and we have invented all kinds of devices to improve our seeing. We have ordinary glasses, bifocals, magnifying glasses, binoculars, telescopes and microscopes. We can see more and farther than at any time in our history.

Physical sight is a wonderful gift that we should never take for granted. A woman tells of how her life was turned upside down when she lost her sight as the result of a car crash. Ever since she has inhabited a world of darkness. Now, several years later she barely remembers what her children look like. She hasn't seen any of her grandchildren. She says that she would have been happy if she had only been left with the vision of one eye and not received any compensation. She says that she would love to be able to tell night from day.

Physical sight is a great gift but Jesus didn't come to earth to give us physical sight. The miracle he performed for Bartimaeus happens regularly in our hospitals today. We hear of people who have been blind for many years miraculously having their sight restored, or at least partially restored. So, does this mean that the gospel story has no relevance for us? No, because the Gospel story is not about physical seeing. Jesus didn't come to earth to give us physical sight but the kind of sight that enables us to see heavenly realities. The gospel story is about how a man came to believe in Jesus.

His journey from blindness symbolises the journey from unbelief to faith which is a journey from darkness to light. St Paul tells his converts at Ephesus *"For you once were in darkness but now you are light in the Lord"*. There is blindness that is worse than physical blindness - the blindness of unbelief. Physical sight is a marvellous gift but faith is more precious still. Without faith there is a sense that we will always be in the dark - faith opens our eyes to a new vision of the world.

The gospel story is more a discipleship story than a healing story. When Bartimaeus was cured he could have forgotten about Jesus and gone off to live his own life. Instead we are told that he 'followed Jesus along the road'. 'Followed him along the road' doesn't simply mean that he joined the crowd on the road to Jerusalem. There can be no doubt as to what St Mark intends - Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way of Christian discipleship and that is the real climax of the story.

From being a mere believer, Bartimaeus became a disciple. There is a big difference between the two. One could be a believer without it having any effect on one's life but when one becomes a disciple one tries to live as a Christian. Bartimaeus was in darkness until he met Jesus. To believe in Jesus is to have an unfailing lamp for our path. We show that we are following his light by the way we live. St Paul says *'the effects of the light are seen in goodness, right living and truth'*.

Here on earth, although we can have a sense of God, we do not see God himself. We have to be content to travel in the light of faith towards the land where we shall see as we are seen. We can make our own heartfelt prayer the prayer of Bartimaeus - 'Lord, that I may see.' That we may see what is truly important in life and, above all, that we may see with the eyes of faith.

StF 641 – When circumstances make my life

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| 1) When circumstances make my life
Too hard to understand,
No doubt or fear, no pain or strife,
Can snatch me from God's hand. | 3) Though sorrow and perplexity
Are often what I feel,
Gethsemane and Calvary
Affirm God's love is real. |
| 2) In valleys where the path is steep,
With shadows dark and long,
I know the Shepherd leads his sheep -
His grace will keep me strong. | 4) It is enough for me to know
God's promise and God's care:
Wherever on life's path I go
My Saviour will be there. |

Second Reflection - Mark 10:46-52

Picture this scene....Where are you in it? Are you one of those standing over the beggar, a look of disapproval on your face? It's easy to become one of the pretentious bystanders eager to protect Jesus, pompously insisting they know what is right for him. "Be quiet" they order the beggar, sitting there excluded as always, from the bustle, another outsider for Jesus to notice.

I said 'Picture this scene.' How can Bartimaeus picture anything? Imagine being blind, maybe treasuring the small smudge of grey that is left in the centre of your vision. I don't know how many of you watch 'Strictly come Dancing' on a Saturday evening but for those of you who do Isn't Chris absolutely amazing? He is performing just as well as the other competitors - probably better than some - and yet he can't see! When we lose one of our senses it seems that the other senses take over.

But to go back to the story, what Bartimaeus does first when he approaches Jesus, he throws off his cloak. He lets go of the old, tired cloak of habit, the heavy cloak that covers him in failure. He throws off his threadbare cloak and reveals the person within. He throws off his old self.

Picture how Bartimaeus 'sprang up', with what eagerness he sought the cure and his certainty that Jesus could do this for him. It is as if he knew at once that his secret hope was granted. He would have only one option but to follow Jesus into a new life, and in that new life, the old cloak of self would get in the way.

So if Jesus were to walk past us today and ask us 'What do you want me to do for you?' What would you say? What thing do you need most? Though at different times of our lives the specific request might change, the fundamental plea surely must always be "Draw me nearer to you".

Prayer

Father of light, in whom there is no trace of darkness, we thank you for the great gift of sight. Fill us with compassion for those who do not have it: direct the efforts that are made for their welfare; reveal to them the things which eye has not seen, and comfort them with the hope of seeing light everlasting; to which, in your great mercy, we ask you to bring us all. **Amen**

StF 706 – Longing for light

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| 1) Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see. | 3) Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed. |
| Ch) <i>Christ, be our light!</i>
<i>Shine in our hearts. Shine through the darkness.</i>
<i>Christ, be our light!</i>
<i>Shine in your Church gathered today.</i> | 4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone. |
| 2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. | 5) Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come. |

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Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we pray for those in the darkness of doubt, for those who long to believe, to have faith to trust; for those with questions they can't answer, and for those whose doubts are simply tearing them apart; for those whose ability to trust has been damaged by the behaviour of others.

Lord in the darkness - **come as the light**

Lord we pray for those whose lives are trapped by the darkness of fear; for those facing a time of uncertainty, illness and the fear that comes from not knowing; for those in hospital and those undergoing unpleasant treatment; for those who wait in dark days of anxiety.

Lord in the darkness - **come as the light**

Lord we pray for those whose lives have been darkened by disaster; for those whose lives have been destroyed by impact of earthquake, flood, fire or war; for those who have lost everything and everyone that mattered to them; we think especially of those facing hunger and starvation through no fault of their own; for those struggling for existence and for those who know they are losing the fight.

Lord in the darkness - **Come as the light**

Lord we pray for those whose lives have been touched by your grace and whose lives are set ablaze with your love; for those whose faith in Christ is daily being renewed and the light of the Father's presence fills them with hope, peace and joy from within; for those for whom the light of the Spirit is the source of their strength, the compassion and their trust.

Lord in the darkness - **Come as the light**

Lord we pray for those we know by name that the light of Christ will bring them the joy of renewal and refreshment - We think especially of

Lord in the darkness - **Come as the light**

And lastly we pray for ourselves that the light of Christ will find its way into the darkest corners of our lives that we may walk in the light of his love.

Lord in the darkness - **Come as the light. Amen.**

Third Reflection – from Eddie Askew, Disguises of Love

Lord, what I really want is a world without problems. Where everything's easy and warm and cosy. A world I can predict, with no surprises. A world where riches don't turn into rags at midnight. A world of harmony and good feelings.

But its not like that Lord, there are wars and rumours of wars. Pain and exploitation. Broken lives on rubbish dumps where hope lies bleeding.

Lord I don't understand the way you do things. Sometimes I think I never will!

With your power, your wisdom, your love, couldn't you have done it differently? Made it easier?

No, I don't understand. All the theology in the world doesn't really answer the question which bobs to the surface in my mind again and again. And yet - if that's the way it is, with your power and wisdom and love - maybe that's the way it has to be - for now.

It was no easier for Jesus, was it Lord?

And the problems he faced were not of his making. Not like my little problems.

The molehills that seem like mountains.

His problems took him to the cross - To pain - to death.

No. Not to pain, to death - not to, but through.

Because the one thing I know is that he came out on the other side.

Lord, I pray for all who find life hard today. Help them to hang on to that.

Help them cling to it when their faith is low - when they're down.

When life is hard to understand - and even harder to live.

And help me realise that — I don't need to understand - Amen.

StF 639 – Through the love of God our Saviour

- 1) Through the love of God our Saviour,
All will be well;
Free and changeless is His favour,
All, all is well:
Precious is the blood that healed us;
Perfect is the grace that sealed us;
Strong the hand stretched forth to shield us,
All must be well.
- 2) Though we pass through tribulation,
All will be well;
Christ hath purchased full salvation,
All, all is well:
Happy still in God confiding;
Fruitful, if in Christ abiding;
Holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
All must be well.
- 3) We expect a bright tomorrow;
All will be well;
Faith can sing through days of sorrow,
All, all is well:
On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
Then in living or in dying
All must be well.

Mary Peters

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of sight. Bless us always with the gift of insight. Grant us clarity of understanding, and then give us a vision of your glory. Lord light us with the fire of your Spirit and fire us with the light of your love. **Amen**