

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, October 24, 2021

22nd Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 30/Proper 25/Year B

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-9

Second Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

Gospel Reading: Mark 10:46-52

Sermon Title: “*The Big Ask*”

Theme

Bartimaeus comes to Jesus with faith, asking that he might see again. Recognizing Jesus' identity, Bartimaeus is the first person to call him “Son of David” in the Gospel of Mark.

Text

⁴⁶As [Jesus] and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” ⁵²Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Sermon

This October, each of the Gospel Readings have featured an important question:

October 3 – The Pharisees came to test Jesus by asking him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” I told you then, the actual question wasn’t the issue; the test was the issue, but nevertheless, it’s an important question.

October 10 – A man who was burdened with many possessions knelt before Jesus and asked “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” I told you then, that this may just well be one of the most important questions in a disciple’s life.

October 17 – James and John, the "Sons of Blunder" boldly came to Jesus and didn't ask a question but made a demand, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” But that demand elicited a question from Jesus, who asked them, “What is it you want me to do for you?”

And in today's Gospel Reading, blind Bartimaeus called out to Jesus to have mercy on him. Again, not really a question, more of a desperate plea, but it too elicited a question from Jesus, who asked, “What do you want me to do for you?”

So I find myself emboldened to make "The Big Ask." One has to be careful how one says that; "The Big Ask."

Today I am starting the 2022 Annual Stewardship Campaign, which the Give Table has entitled "Welcome Home." "Welcome Home," you ask? That doesn't sound like the title of a stewardship campaign, you might be thinking. Well, I would disagree. We understand that personal stewardship is that three-legged stool; those three legs are Time, Talent, and Treasure. And many of the aspects of ministry that we have come to love and expect at Zion have been reduced or stopped altogether:

- From May 2020 through September 2021, we reduced our previously glorious worship service to the essentials in 45 minutes or less;
- We have skipped Sunday School for two program years;
- We have skipped VBS for two summers;
- We didn't have Live Nativity last Christmas and won't have it again this Christmas

- We didn't have an eat-in Thanksgiving Dinner last year and won't have it again this Thanksgiving;
- Christmas Eve went from four glorious services to three slightly less glorious services.
- And perhaps worst of all, we still don't have coffee hour.

I recognize that we are not out of the pandemic yet. Depending on who you listen to, we may never be out of it, but these are just some of the ways that we have carried on despite the pandemic.

We postponed Rally Day till October to see who would come back, and speaking only for myself, I was disappointed because we really did not see the return of many members.

Now listen carefully: If you are one of those people who don't feel it is safe for you to return, then I respect your decision. But what has confounded me is that many people have returned to work at their places of work, and kids have returned to school and extracurricular activities, I've seen you around town – but not to church.

Again on October 3, the Pharisees were testing Jesus, but because he knew scripture and had an intimate relationship with his Heavenly Father he knew the answer. I'm not comparing any mere mortal to Jesus Christ, none of us could compare to that, but as a disciple of Jesus Christ, shouldn't you know what you stand for? A wise person once said, "If you don't know what you stand for, you'll fall for anything." Discipleship happens at Zion.

Again on October 10, a man who was burdened with many possessions knelt before Jesus and asked "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus told him to shed his burden and come follow him. God blesses God's creation so that we can be a blessing to others. Now you may not like Jesus' answer, but wouldn't you rather hear the truth that sets you free so that you can receive God's greatest gift? Personal stewardship happens at Zion.

Again on October 17, James and John, the "Sons of Blunder" boldly came to Jesus and didn't ask a question but made an audacious demand. Jesus took the opportunity to re-orient them to a life of servanthood that he himself modeled. Opportunities to express servanthood happen at Zion.

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And in today's Gospel Reading, blind Bartimaeus called out to Jesus to have mercy on him. We get calls for mercy almost every day, you see them as our prayer requests. In addition to that, we feed people every month, we extend Zion's hand of fellowship when we take Holy Communion and a friendly visit to our homebound and hospitalized. And in addition, we often help complete strangers – oh the stories I could tell. Mercy happens at Zion.

Some of this, a lot of this, is done by me and my staff. I won't let us let anyone down. But Zion is *your* church. You belong here. We belong together.

Look to the example of the Lawson family. Not one of them does it all, but each one of them does a few things – a few things that make Zion the place we call home. What do you do? What can you do? What will you do?

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

So here is my "Big Ask."

We need your *time*. We need your participation to be all we can be. There are days when I feel like we are starting up a mission congregation because the person that used to do that thing isn't here. We need you to participate in the ministry of your church. Will you commit to taking on one new thing?

We need your *treasure*. I am sure that you are aware that everything in our economy is getting more expensive. Everything we use at Zion is getting more expensive too. To keep up, we need your financial support. Will you consider increasing your financial commitment?

We need your *talent*. All of us have been gifted by God with talents that are to be used by the body for the greater good of the whole body. What can you do for your church that will help us advance the cause of Christ through your church? Will you commit to using your talents to advance the cause of Christ through your church?

You that are here in the sanctuary are the ones who are doing everything that is getting done, but you know we aren't the church we used to be just two years ago. My Big Ask of you is that you consider participating more in all three aspects of ministry. Will you help advance the cause of Christ through your church?

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You that are watching from home, do what you need to do to stay safe. I understand. God revealed in Jesus Christ understands. But know you are missed. Would you please consider supporting your church from a distance? Your church needs to survive to continue to lead and serve the community. We need your help to do that.

As I said, the 2022 Annual Stewardship Campaign is entitled "Welcome Home" and I give you that greeting in all sincerity on behalf of the entire Zion family.

Welcome home. You belong here. We belong together.

Prayer

Loving, merciful, generous God, look upon your world in its pandemic distress. Give us faith to trust you to get us through it. Give us glad and generous hearts to do ministry within it. And give us grace to find you Amen