

Your faith has made you well

Mark 10:46-52

October 25, 2015

Bartimaeus was loud. I am quiet.

Bartimaeus was aggressive. I am restrained.

Bartimaeus was demanding. I am acquiescent.

Bartimaeus was impudent. I am polite.

Bartimaeus was blind. I can see.

Bartimaeus had faith. And I Maybe I am the one who cannot see.

Jesus told Bartimaeus: "Your faith has made you well." Is faith loud, demanding, impudent? Sometimes. Not always, not necessarily, but sometimes it may be.

What is true, in every case, is that faith does not hold back. Faith asks for what it wants. Faith is not afraid of asking for what it wants, because it is not afraid of being disappointed, because it is sure of the One of whom it asks it.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: "To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see." Bartimaeus was sure of the thing he hoped for. He wanted to see and he was sure that Jesus could give him what he wanted, and so he asked. Bartimaeus was certain of the things he could not see, which was everything!

Faith's opposite is resignation. It is what it is and always will be. There is nothing I can do to change it. There is nothing anybody can do to change it. I am blind beggar, doomed by fate or ignorance or misfortune to spend the rest of my days sitting and begging, watching the world pass me by, or, I should say, not being able even to watch the world, watch life, as it passes me by.

Faith's opposite is despair: not hoping, not expecting, stoically accepting your lot. So you see, despair is not always self-pitying. Despair can be noble, daring to live on in spite of knowing you will never have what you want.

"Your faith has made you well." What does it mean to be made well? To see? To be set free from your infirmity? To be healed of your disease? Yes, surely this is being made well. But not all are healed, even when they ask.

Does that mean those who are not healed don't have enough faith? I cannot accept that. I cannot believe that. It makes God out to be a cruel Lord, doling out blessings to a very select few and ignoring the heartfelt pleas of the rest of his children.

Does it mean, then, that faith itself is a crock, that healing when it does comes only comes by chance or fate or accident, and not by faith? I cannot accept that either, because then we are brought back to despair, that there is nothing we can do, nothing anybody can do, nothing God can do.

“Your faith has made you well.” What does it mean to be made well? Jesus said: “Go, your faith has made you well” and then -- then -- Bartimaeus was able to see. Could it be that Bartimaeus was already made well before he could see? Could it be that faith itself is wellness? That it is wellness to live with hope? That it is wellness to live with assurance? That it is wellness to believe, to know, that it will be well?

Faith is not an incantation, a magical formula. It's not: say the right words, have enough faith, and “pop” -- you get what you want. Faith is trust, trust that God will be good. Faith is trust in the promise.

And what is the promise? This is the way our statement of faith puts it:

*You promise to all who trust you
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.*

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for ...

To be sure that we are forgiven. To be sure God's grace will fill us and sustain us and empower us and comfort us and give us life today and tomorrow and forever.

To be sure that God will give us courage enough to engage this world and challenge its injustices, courage enough to work tirelessly for peace even in the face of what seems to be a hopelessly divided world and permanent war.

To be sure God is with us, all the time, when things are wonderful and when things are terrible.

To be sure we will have, to be sure we do have, eternal life.

To have faith is to be certain of the things we cannot see ...

To be certain of God's kingdom, which is already, but not yet.

To be certain of God's promise of a new heaven and the new earth, which is still to come.

To be certain of God whom we cannot see.

Isn't this what it means to be made well? To be certain of the future? To be sure of God? To know that God's grace will sustain us all the days of our lives? To know that God is with us? To know that God with us means life in all its fullness? To know that God with us means eternal life? Isn't this being well?

Whether you are quiet like me or loud like Bartimaeus, whether you are demanding or acquiescent, pushy or polite, may you have faith! May you be sure of what you hope for. May you be certain of what you cannot see. And may your faith make you well.