

Last Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 24th October 2021
Bible Sunday



Dear Friends in Christ,

‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ (Mark 10: 47)

This beautifully sunny Thursday morning, as I write to you, I’m mindful of two phrases which have been playing around in my head: *‘Be careful what you pray for’* and *‘Thank God!’* I heard myself uttering the first phrase to the Diocesan Property Administrator, Rosie Sanderson, first thing this morning. We have been in technical discussions since the Rectory central heating refused to click into life when I tested it earlier in the week. Rosie had given me some helpful ways of trying to kick-start the boiler. Last night, it was all systems go! We said *‘Thank God!’* as our prayers were answered - the radiators warming us on what was proving to be a cold, wet evening. By about 11pm, however, we were beginning to swelter ... with the central heating belting out 30 degrees of heat all night, even though the thermostat was firmly switched to ‘OFF.’ By 9am, the Rectory felt like the core of a thermo-nuclear reactor, and I was beginning to worry whether we would be reported to COP26 as being one of the key contributors to the climate crisis! I could hear my mother saying *‘Be careful what you pray for!’*



‘Old Woman at Prayer’ by Rembrandt

Our Gospel reading on this Bible Sunday gives us the enduring story of blind Bartimaeus. As Mark, whose purpose is to prove Jesus as the Messiah, brings us to the climactic section of his narrative of Jesus' earthly ministry, it might seem a little odd for this gospel-writer of few words to find space to present us with an episode of Jesus on the move through Jericho, healing yet another stricken soul.



'Orthodox Icon of Jesus Healing Bartimaeus'

But dig deeper, and we begin to see where Mark is taking us. Mark is at pains to tell us Bartimaeus' lineage. He is Timaeus' son; the proud bearer of his father's name. We swiftly come to recognise how this destitute man, begging by the side of the road is being exceptionally careful: he knows exactly what to pray for. More to the point, Bartimaeus knows exactly to whom he is praying. '*Jesus of Nazareth, he cries 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.'*

This chapter of Mark's gospel is the bible at its best – clear concise, carrying us swiftly to the feet of Christ. Hear through such spare phrasing, how, Bartimaeus, a physically blind man has the spiritual acuity, not just to see who Jesus is, but to call out His lineage. Bartimaeus is in no doubt that, even though Jesus has come from the obscurity of a peasant village like Nazareth, he is praying directly to God. Bartimaeus can sense his Saviour, of the line of David, is standing right there before him. With breath-taking brevity, Mark is asking what more any of us need to see or hear than this truth?

So how do we in our modern world learn from Bartimaeus? Well, we could start by seeing! Jesus saw Bartimaeus. He heard him too. Jesus understood everything about this man who had become invisible to his community. As a poor, sick, blind beggar, he had no value to those around him. Yet it was this very man whom Jesus blessed, healed and lifted up in His tender love. So, two things for us to ponder. First, we could learn from Bartimaeus' clarity of vision in focussing on Christ as his Lord and Saviour. Second, we could learn from the way Jesus' compassionate heart responded to this faithful man's predicament; seeing beyond Bartimaeus' immediate troubles to the longings of his eternal soul. In our own lives, are we able to do something similar? To look beyond the immediate predicament of another, so as to uphold what they could be, touched by our Christian embrace.



'Little Amal meets Pope Francis in Rome' – source ncronline.org

Currently making her way across Europe to the UK, is a modern-day Bartimaeus. A contemporary piece of living art, *'Little Amal'* is an 11 feet tall puppet. She is an unmistakable representation of the plight of refugees - the sorts of people we have become inured to in our world, just as Bartimaeus had become in his own time. Little Amal portrays the horrific journey of an unaccompanied 9-year-old Syrian refugee girl who is looking for her mother; hoping to start a new life. The puppet embarked upon her 5,000-mile pilgrimage from the Syrian border on 27th July 2021, and has travelled through eight countries en route to her final destination in Manchester, where she is due to arrive in early November. Little Amal has travelled through Greece, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and France – a reflection of the perilous and complex journeys many asylum seekers face. She arrived in Rome on 10th September, where Pope Francis came to embrace her.

Little Amal is making us see her. She is forcing us to hear the stories of thousands upon thousands of men, women and children just like her who are fleeing the very real threats which face them in their own lands. We pray for people such as these in our churches each week. Yet they are far away, remote from our own lives. They are easily forgotten in the stresses of domestic situations like broken boilers. But Little Amal is not letting us forget. She is coming to find us; to remind us of our prayerful promises before God, who has shown us what is good; requiring of us to *'act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly;'* in love for all. Little Amal is holding up a mirror to our lives. We must be careful what we pray for, indeed.



'Little Amal visits L'Église du Beguinage, in Brussels, Belgium where more than 300 undocumented migrants occupy the church' – The Guardian

How instinctively do we know Jesus? How often do we study His wise teachings? We need to remember to un-wrap God's word made flesh and live it out; not keep it on a shelf somewhere, unread, un-lived. Little Amal is Bartimaeus to a new generation of bible readers. She asks us to look at what we will not see; to respond to what we cannot accept and to love what our shallow faith does not believe we need to embrace. However sweltering my home might be this morning, I am thanking God that I have a roof over my head, enough food to eat and a secure country in which to thrive in peace. This Bible Sunday, I pray we will each take time to reconnect with the word of God made flesh through people like Bartimaeus, who calls Jesus the Son of David and shows that, even though he is physically blind, he recognises Jesus as the Messiah.

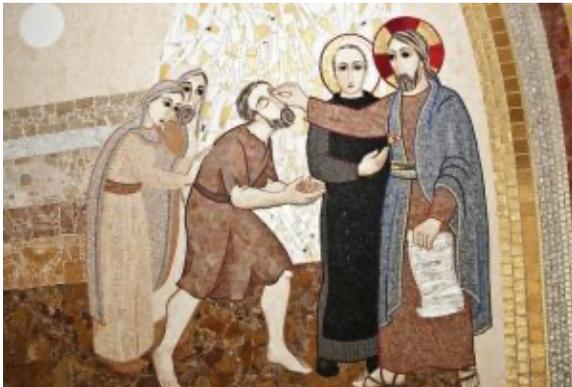
Jesus blesses the acuity of Bartimaeus' vibrant faith. He also asks us to shine out God's glory - living out His word by our loving behaviour, our compassion and our delight in helping others to live fulfilled lives. Let us pray carefully for that.

Yours, in the healing love of Christ,

Jax
Rector, The Downs Benefice

Collect Prayer for the Last Sunday after Trinity

Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:
 help us so to hear them,
 to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them
that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word,
 we may embrace and for ever hold fast
 the hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ,
 who is alive and reigns with you,
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, now and for ever. Amen.



Mark 10:46-52 - Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

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.

Schedule of Services

This schedule is correct at this time but may be subject to future alterations – please check on our website for the most up-to-date information.

All services start at 10am, unless marked differently on the table below

Please could you continue to book to attend services by contacting the Benefice Office on 01962 880 845 or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

Please would you also continue to wear masks until we are advised otherwise.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>24th Oct</i>			Morning Prayer	Harvest Festival	8am - Holy Communion
<i>27th Oct (Wed)</i>			Mid-Week Holy Communion		
<i>31st Oct</i>	<i>With Wherwell</i>	All Souls Service		6pm – All Souls Service	3pm – All Souls Service <i>PLUS</i> 6pm – Autumn Meditation Series – Thomas à Becket
<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>2nd Nov (Tues)</i>			6pm – All Souls' Service		
<i>7th Nov</i>	Morning Prayer	Holy Communion	4pm – Café Church (<i>in Church Room</i>)		
<i>11th Nov (Thurs)</i>			10.55am – Act of Remembrance <i>at the War Memorial</i>		
<i>14th Nov</i>	10.55am Remembrance Service	10.55am Remembrance Service <i>at the War Memorial</i>	<i>Service at Sir John Moore Barracks.</i>	10.55am Remembrance Service	<i>With Chilbolton</i>

			<i>Details to be confirmed.</i>		
<i>21st Nov</i>		Morning Prayer		8am – Holy Communion (BCP)	
<i>24th Nov (Wed)</i>			Mid-Week Holy Communion		
<i>28th Nov</i>			11.15am – Patronal Festival	Morning Prayer and Baptism	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)