

White Canes and Deep Questions  
Mark 10:46-52  
NUCC Traditional  
28 October 2018

\*PRAY

One long hot summer in a place called St. Johns, there came into town a man with a big tent which he set up at the corner of Lombard and Clarendon, with a sign posted in front: The Great Marcel and His Fabulous Snake Show! He was dapper and slim, and he wore a stovepipe hat and a cutaway coat. And when the crowds gathered around the tent that night and oil torches flickered their light over a young woman dancing with snakes, Marcel told of his “wonderful oil oil extracted from snakes that cured every human ill.” He promised it would cure corns, calluses, colds, indigestion, and was especially potent in dealing with certain private diseases. Best of all, it was only a dollar a bottle. Everybody agreed it was worth a try, and for years afterwards nobody could open a drugstore in St. Johns, because Marcel's Snake Oil was good for everything, and everybody had plenty of it.

There have always been healers. Some have gotten rich exploiting the pain of desperate people with nowhere else to turn. Maybe that is why when Jesus healed people he often told them to tell no one. Perhaps that is why he did not want to be called "healer" but rather "teacher." Maybe that's why he described himself as the “way to everlasting life.”

At one point he and his disciples were passing through the city of Jericho, a beautiful city approximately fifteen miles northeast of Jerusalem. Jesus was at the height of his popularity, and great crowds greeted him. Although we don't know for sure,

perhaps Jesus spent a day in Jericho teaching, which might explain why the people were so excited about having him visit their city.

Regardless, as Jesus was leaving the city he encountered some of those desperate people with nowhere else to turn. Let me set the scene. Ancient cities were surrounded by a wall to protect them from attack. At nightfall the gates in the wall would be closed for security. During the day, you could always find beggars just outside these gates. They were the forgotten people, cut off from their family and friends. Their only hope was that a stranger passing through might stop, take pity on them, and give them something to eat or possibly even a few coins. The situation was not unlike the homeless living in an encampment at Pine Ridge and 75 out of the view of most passers-by.

But Jesus did see them, and they stirred his compassion. There was one man in particular who got Jesus' attention - a blind beggar named Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus was crying out louder than all the rest, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" So, Jesus stopped to see what he could do.

They have an interesting exchange during which Jesus once again asks: "What do you want me to do for you?" If you remember last week's text from the gospel of Mark, Jesus asked James & John the same question. And Jesus says: "Go, your faith has made you well."

But what struck me about this passage was how the people around Bartimaeus encouraged his faith. Bartimaeus was a single voice shouting in a crowd: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Some ordered him to be quiet. But when Jesus asked for him, others around him began to say: "Take

heart..." I love that image. There is a large, boisterous crowd clamoring for the attention of Jesus. And Bartimaeus had shouted with all his might perhaps starting to give up hope. Perhaps at his lowest and at a moment of complete despair, it was the community around him who rallied, and said to Bartimaeus, "Take heart."

These words came across my Facebook page late yesterday afternoon:

Dear Friends, There are no words to adequately express the pain and sorrow we feel watching the news out of Pittsburgh. Our hearts break over the tragic shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue and our prayers for strength and hope go out to the members of that congregation and its families... Safety remains a high priority and we continually monitor our security protocols at Temple Shalom. We work in partnership with the Collier County Sheriff's Office to review and implement best practices. As part of our safety protocols, officers from the Collier County Sheriff's Office and the Florida Highway Patrol have been, and will continue to be, present at Religious School, worship services and events at Temple Shalom, while a security guard remains dedicated to protecting our families at Temple Shalom Preschool. We are committed to keeping Temple Shalom and its families safe. L'shalom, Rabbi Adam Miller, Cantor Donna Mashadi-Azu, Deborah Fidel, Debra Antzis"

Calling it the "most horrific crime scene" he had seen in 22 years with the F.B.I., Robert Jones, special agent in charge in Pittsburgh, said the [Tree of Life] synagogue was in the midst of a "peaceful service" when congregants were gunned down and "brutally murdered by a gunman targeting them simply because of their faith." I will add that he did this primarily using a semi-automatic assault rifle.

I don't know about you, but it is easier to distance myself from horrific tragedies like this when they are far away. But to think about what our brothers and sisters just down Pine Ridge Road must be feeling, and to think about the extra layer of security protocols they must endure, literally makes my stomach turn.

So what does one do with these deep questions? How do we turn to our Jewish neighbors and say “Shalom...peace” in a time of fear? I believe our calling is to be like the crowd that day after Jesus instructed Bartimaeus to draw near. When those in the crowd leaned in and said: “Take heart.” They were the ones who carried his faith perhaps when he struggled to find it himself. And I believe that is our calling today: to lean in and say to a hurting world, “Take heart.”