

## Let Your Yes be YES

### Stewardship Sunday at Holy Trinity UMC October 29, 2006

Rev. Susan Morrison

Mark 10: 46 – 52

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

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Jesus had not had a good nights sleep.(1) He was on his way to Jerusalem with his 12 best friends. The route took them through Jericho and it was there that they all saw the familiar sight of a blind beggar, rocking back and forth on his heels. But this blind man, whose name was Bartimaeus, had amazing sensory perception. Without seeing, he knew who was coming down that road.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” cried out Bartimaeus.

Jesus disciples were somewhat astonished. It was the first time that someone without status, someone without any authority, in fact a down right nobody, had called Jesus by this title, Son of David, that suggested the Messiahship of Jesus. How could this blind beggar recognize what everyone else couldn't see – that this Jesus was the long awaited Savior?

“Be quiet” yells one of the disciples to Bartimaeus. “Don't bother this important Rabbi.”

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” cried Bartimaeus a second time.

“Shut up, you blind beggar” yelled one of the disciples. “The master doesn't have time for the likes of you. He's on his way to Jerusalem.”

“Call him here” said Jesus, as he stops to engage with this blind beggar.

Suddenly the disciples tune changed! “Wow! Bartimaeus! Hurry. Get up. Today is your lucky day!”

And with that, Bartimaeus flung off his cloak, sprang to his feet, and rushed toward the sound of Jesus' voice.

“What do you want from me?” asks Jesus. “What do you want from me today?”

“Why I want to be able to see again” replies Bartimaeus, without skipping a beat.

“Go your way. Your faith has made you well” says Jesus.

And with that, Bartimaeus is healed! He opens his eyes. They work. He blinks again. He can see.

“Go your way.” Jesus had said to him. But now there is only one way. It is the way of Jesus. It is the way of discipleship. So Bartimaeus does not go his way, instead he chooses the road to Jerusalem in the company of Jesus, Son of David, the Savior of the world. Bartimaeus says YES to following Jesus.

What a powerful story for Stewardship Sunday at Holy Trinity. It is as if Jesus is passing through Danvers and chooses to join us for worship and walk down the center aisle of Holy Trinity. “Jesus, Son of David” we shout. “Welcome! Welcome to our congregation!” And even as we greet him we begin to shed those garments that keep us from a relationship with him. And as we do so, we replace the power of predictability with the power of possibility. We throw down our self sufficiency; we discard our need for more and more things in our lives; we dispose of our fears of not having enough, of needing to be more and more secure; we unpack our frugality; we unburden ourselves of whatever it is that separates us from Jesus’ grace and God’s unconditional love.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks us. And having read your “blessings” that filled the bushel baskets last week, I have an idea of what you might say. “Continue to bless me with the love of family and friends, with good health, with this church community that means so much to me. Bless my children and grandchildren. Bless my work and my income. Continue to bless me with a safe place to sleep and bread for today and clean clothes and the luxury of running water and heat. Continue to bless my mind and my spirit that I might be able to make a difference in your world.

And Jesus says “You are so blessed.” And then he continues “And what do you, as a church, want me to do for you?”

“Give us a vision of how we might best serve you in the days to come. Give us the spirit of generosity so that the mission and ministry of this church can be realized. Open our eyes to the needs of Holy Trinity in the coming year....financial support for the work of our committees and programs; salary for the new position of Co ordinator of Program Ministries; money for capital improvements to our facility. Open our eyes to the needs of your world that we might appreciate how our mission shares make a difference” we reply.

“Go,” says Jesus. “Your faith will make all of this possible. That’s what being my disciples promises. But remember, it means being yoked to me. It means picking up your cross of sacrifice and priority setting, risk-taking and generosity.”

Will we, like Bartimaeus, choose to go the way of Jesus this morning? Will our yes be truly a YES?

I recently met Bartimaeus in the person of Cindy Hayden, who has given me her permission to tell you her story. Cindy is married to Bruce Hayden, who is the great, great nephew of Bill Eaton. This fall, Bill Eaton, long time member of Holy Trinity, died at the age of 95. He had been living with Bruce and Cindy in Warsaw, New York these past few years when his own declining health demanded day to day care.

Cindy had married Bruce in 1983. She had been previously married and brought two children into their marriage, Blake and Jamison. At the time she was an active alcoholic but denied the seriousness of her drinking problem. In 1990, at age 17, Blake committed suicide. It was a pain-filled, grief-ridden time for Cindy and Bruce. Any of you who have lost children to death can empathize. Any of us can only imagine the enormity of the tragedy. Four years later on the Fourth of July when she was too drunk to go to the Fourth of July fireworks in their little town, Cindy checked herself into a detox unit and began rehabilitation for her alcoholism. She has not had a drink since that day.

That was the day that she threw down her cloak and sprang up to receive the gift of new life from God. “What do you need for me to do for you?” Jesus asked her. “I need a new life” she replied. “I need to have the eyes of my heart opened so that I can be whole.” She followed in the footsteps of Jesus and began to take care of herself. AA became a daily routine. Grief counseling helped her begin to sort out the complexity of Blake’s suicide. Prayer grounded her in Christ’s grace day and night.

It was easy for her to welcome Bruce's great, great uncle into their home a few years ago. No longer self absorbed, Cindy was genuinely gracious and generous, willing to give of herself to others in response to God's blessings in her "new" life.

And so it was that on Saturday, September 23rd I met Bruce and Cindy Hayden and sat with them in the church library to plan Bill Eaton's funeral. I had suggested to them that in lieu of flowers, they encourage friends and relatives to make a donation to the Matthew Graham Bell Tower Fund in memory of Bill Eaton. Unbeknownst to me, Gloria LeBlanc, another distant relative of Bill Eaton, had shared the tragedy of Matt Graham's death with Bruce and Cindy and the dream of some day having the bells at Holy Trinity ring once again.

"We have one last request," said Cindy as we finished planning for Bill's funeral. "We have talked with numerous family members about Bill's estate. Although he and Gladys never had children of their own, they have dozens of nieces and nephews who are like children to them. Instead of everyone getting small increments of money, we have decided to gift Holy Trinity so that the bell tower project can be completed.

And with that she took out Uncle Bill's checkbook and asked "So, how much more money is needed to repair the bell tower?"

I was trembling inside and tears were rolling down my cheeks as I said "\$7,000." and watched her write that check. "Whatever else you need, just let us know."

Bruce and Cindy Hayden knew how to say "YES" to the abundant life that Jesus had given to them. Like Bartimaeus, they had a choice of following their own way (and pocketing Bill's money for themselves) or accompanying Jesus on the way of generous, joyful giving.

The choice is ours this morning. What will be our response to the blessings that we have received from God? This Is The Day!! May we be willing to sacrifice something that we think that we want in order that the ministries of Holy Trinity might be realized. May our "Yes" be a "YES" and may we experience the joy and abundance of following Jesus on the way. Alleluia. Amen.

(1) I want to acknowledge Barbara Brown Taylor's sermon that I have used as a resource and inspiration for the interpretation of this passage from Mark.