

Where are the people? The Lord called Jeremiah to prophesy under the trying circumstances of the final days of the kingdom of Judah. People may listen to a prophet for a little while, but then it seems as if they abandon hope, or they listen to other voices pulling them in the wrong direction. Jeremiah cautions, “Do not be deceived by the prophets and diviners who are among you; do not listen to those among you who dream dreams, for they prophesy lies to you in my name” (Jer 20:8-9). As the people returned to their old ways of idolatry, Jeremiah saw doom and gloom on the horizon. There are consequences to our actions when we walk away from God.

Where are the people? Our own times are trying under the weight of a world that all too often walks away from God. Who is the prophet and who is the false prophet? Who will lead us to God and who will lead us astray? Many voices pull us in different directions. It is easy to be deceived, it is easy to fall into old habits of sin.

Where are the people? Jeremiah is an optimist who sees the restoration of all that is good. The LORD will save his people, he will bring them back from their exile. The blind and the lame will come from the ends of the earth. “For I am a father to Israel ... Hear the word of the LORD, you nations, proclaim it on distant coasts, and say: The One who scattered Israel, now gathers them; he guards them as a shepherd his flock” (Jer 31:9c-10). Hope springs eternal for and end to the pandemic ... but for that to truly happen, the people must listen to God and return to him.

Where are the people? The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. As God calls nations to return to him, he also calls the individual as we see in the healing of the blind man in the Gospel. Bartimaeus is physically blind, but he represents each of us. We are sinners and we each have our own blindness, our prejudice, our selfishness that limits us...pride, lust, envy, greed, sloth, anger, and gluttony. In our blindness, we often see the faults of others while failing to see our own. “Blind Bartimaeus, sitting helplessly by the roadside out of Jericho begging for alms and attention, expresses this hopeless and darkened-over state of a soul.”ⁱ

“Jesus, son of David, have pity on me.” Is this not how we pray for God’s help? “I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.” The voice of one blind man, speaks for all of us as we beseech God for forgiveness of our sins, and the sight to walk with the Lord in all things.

Jesus calls to Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus invites us to cast off our sins and to put on a new garment. “In the early centuries of the church, those about to be baptized were invited to strip themselves of their clothes, symbolizing their renunciation of their old way of life.” Bartimaeus does this, “the blind man prepares for inner transformation by throwing off the cloak of his old consciousness, his old pattern of desire, the lifestyle that has rendered him spiritually blind.”ⁱⁱ

Jesus calls each of us, “What do you want me to do for you?” He has given us the free will to respond or to reject, to seek a new way of life or to cling to the old:

“Have faith in God. Amen, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it shall be done for him. Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours. When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions” (Mk 11:22-25).

Jesus asks for repentance and faith. Like the Prodigal Son, we can return to our Father not as hired hands but with a full restoration of our baptismal grace.

Immediately Bartimaeus began to follow him on the way. The blind man needs a walking stick. The man with restored sight must now let Jesus be his guide. "Once the soul has been transfigured, the only path that seems appealing is the one walked by Christ -- that is to say, the path of radical self-offering, self-surrender." With the new sight that Jesus offers, "we are inspired simply to pour ourselves out in love."ⁱⁱⁱ

The biblical story ends, but it is only the beginning of a new way of life. Touched by his grace, each dawn brings a new day filled with hope and possibility. In the words of my father:

Touched By His Grace

Seeds of grace most truly start __
Within the realm of a hopeful heart.
The beneficial reality of this seed __
Is bringing light to souls in need.

Grace is the seed, that's not forbidden ...
It dwells within __ not to be hidden.
Time will never, ever erase,
A kindness bestowed through seeds of grace.

In helping others to daily cope,
We expand horizons of Christian hope.
Let not your light be in decline __
It remains a grace that's meant to shine.

In deeds, the light of the world are we,
Who possess the grace to set men free ...
Free from the struggles, burdens and cares __
That come from our actions, hopes and prayers.

How hopeful it becomes, when we are aware,
Of bringing grace to those in despair ...
To assist the less fortunate __ and not question "Why?"
To say, "GOD LOVES YOU AND SO DO I."

Each humble task, in this world we trod,
May it be for the greater glory of God.
Heaven awaits __ with our Savior's embrace,
To each soul that is touched by his loving grace.

ⁱ Barron, Robert. The Word on Fire Bible, pg 236.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 237.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.