

Sermon for the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost , 28 October 2012, St Crispin's Day. Rev David Howells

This is my favourite Gospel story. "Blind Bart meets the Son of David"

Let me tell you this story as I imagine it. Perhaps as you may imagine it with all your own details.

It is a hot afternoon, around 4pm, in Palestine.

Imagine what the heat of the air feels like on your face. Imagine the breaths of hot dry air touching your skin. And smell it. What can you smell? Dry grasses, dust, the scent of olive trees, and maybe fragrant plants like rosemary growing somewhere. What else might you smell?

And what are the sounds that you hear? The chirp of crickets and the rattle of cicadas in the trees. You might hear the leaves rustle as the breeze touches them. These are the far-away sounds. But you are sitting by the roadside outside a busy town. What do you hear on the road? There is the sound of people walking, chatting, shoes on gravel. There will be animals bearing loads, donkeys' hooves, cart wheels crunching the dirt, the creak of the wagon and the shift of its load. Voices closer and further away.

Hearing matters. for you have no sight. You are blind. You are sitting by the roadside, and you are blind. How does that feel?

Does it feel safe? You are down low, and everyone else is up high, walking. Donkeys are big and cart-wheels are unforgiving. What if a cart swerves towards you? How will you know? Will a group of men talking fail to notice you and tread on you?

So you listen.

And you call out.

What you call out is easy. You have a job. You beg for a living. You call for money!

Every morning you come here, and every evening you leave. How?

Perhaps you live with family, and they bring you here. You are as old as you are. Perhaps it is one of the children who leads you, slowly, by the hand, to this spot.

"Look, we are here. Sit down. I have put your cushion down. Feel here... There is the water jar. And to the side... there is bread and olives and some cheese. Yes, it's rolled in the oilcloth. Here, let me put your cloak around you. You won't get so dusty. Here's your stick, just by your right hand. Yes, just hold it there and you can fend off anything that gets too close. Between your knees, just in front is your bowl. I hope you have good luck today. It's a longtime till harvest still. Mama says we need God's help, so say a prayer and ask loudly!" And you are alone, by the road into town.

Can you feel the cushion beneath you? And the clothes on your skin? Rough weave, light and airy, but good against the sun. Can you feel the ground beside you? Imagine reaching down to touch it, and feeling the sand, the grit, the pebbles, maybe some rough grass or a larger stone. What else do you feel through your fingers, your skin? Perhaps you can feel the stiffness in your back, in your bones in your shoulders and hips. It is near the end of your day and you wait for the child to come and fetch you home.

But what is it you hear now?

Listen! A lot of people coming! This is good, because someone may give you something. But it is dangerous because a crowd does not look where it goes. You could be trampled.

"What's going on?" You cry out.

"It's the healer, Jesus son of Joseph, the Galilean." Someone says. "He's been in town all afternoon talking and healing. He healed old Micah who couldn't speak. Now he won't shut up!" You hear the laughter.

What goes through your mind?

This is not the first time you've heard his name. The road into town where you sit and beg is full of travelers and they talk of what they see and hear. Jesus the Nazarean. He is said to be a man of God. They say God is with him. Some think he is the One. He healed old Micah... maybe.....

This is the time to pray, you think.

But before you can pray the crowd is getting too close.

You pick up your stick and hold it in front of you. The crowd is surging and it is frightening you.
Should you shout out to warn them you are there?
Should you beg for alms?
Should you shout for Jesus?
Quickly! You need to make up your mind!

“For Jesus, shout for Jesus” a voice inside you says
You suck in the air and call out
“Hey! Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!”
Louder, “Hey! Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!”
Again, louder still, “Hey! Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!”

“Shut up!” someone shouts at you.
“Pipe down, you beggar” says another.
You can feel, or hear or just tell that he is passing, and has passed. You are losing him.
One more try. You bellow “Hey! Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!”
There is a change in the crowd. Slowing, bunching, stopping. A silence is growing. A friendly voice says to you. “I think you’re in luck.” Another person, a way off from you, says “Where’s that shouting person?” A woman’s voice nearby says, “Hey, He’s asking for you. He’ll see you!”
What do you feel? Hope? Fear? What will you say? How will you get to him? Will you be safe?
Suddenly you hear the sound of young feet, strong, sure, no hesitation. “Come on!” two men say, “We’ve come to help you up.” You drop your stick, throw off your cloak and strong hands grasp your hands and arms and, whoa!, you’re up. They walk you, a bit too fast, through the crowd.
It is odd how in such a busy, noisy place a stillness can fall. It’s like being in a pool of calm water surrounded by waves. You stand still. The men who brought you let go. Two hands take your two hands, and though you cannot see you know Jesus is before you. It is he who holds you. He is in no rush.

Someone must have told him your name. The first word he says to you is your name. He knows you! And you feel in your soul that he knows you, deeply, truly.
He speaks, and behind his words is a deeper, harder question
“What do you want me to do for you?”
What **do** you want? What do you want truly, deeply, in the centre of your heart and soul, what do you ask for and long for? What will bring you inner peace? What will make meaning for you, for your life?
What do you need healed, or forgiven, or to receive?
What do you want me to do for you?”

Jesus doesn’t just assume anything. He doesn’t act, but asks you to name your heart’s desire.

So what do **you** truly want? What do you truly long for, hardly dare ask for, secretly hope might happen and fulfill your life?
What answer would you give?

And no sooner do the words come from your mouth than they are fulfilled.
At last you can see clearly. Not just see things, but you see and understand. And not just understand with your head, but with your heart and every fiber of your being.
You can see clearly now, and it all fits together and makes sense.
It is not logic, not theology, not emotion. It is deep, abiding love that you now know. A love which holds and heals and opens you and fills you with deep joy and gratitude beyond expression. A love that knows your name and your heart and, without hesitation, rejoices in you.

And you find yourself saying “I will follow this love all my life long.”
And that is the first step you make.