

Trees, walking

Sunday 12 September 2021

Call to Worship

Psalm 3

GOD! Look! Enemies past counting!

Enemies sprouting like mushrooms,

Mobs of them all around me, roaring their mockery:

“Hah! No help for him from God!”

But you, GOD, shield me on all sides;

You ground my feet, you lift my head high;

With all my might I shout up to GOD,

His answers thunder from the holy mountain.

I stretch myself out. I sleep.

Then I'm up again—rested, tall and steady,

Fearless before the enemy mobs

Coming at me from all sides.

Real help comes from GOD.

Your blessing clothes your people!

All creatures of our God and King

W H Draper

All creatures of our God and King,

Lift up your voice and with us sing

Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou burning sun with golden beam,

Thou silver moon with softer gleam,

O praise him, O praise him,

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,

Ye clouds that sail in heav'n along,

O praise him, alleluia!

Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,

Ye lights of evening, find a voice,

O praise him, O praise him,

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Let all things their Creator bless,

And worship him in humbleness,

O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, three in one,
O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Dear God

Thank you for things that are difficult.

We don't enjoy them.

We often rail against them,

Cursing the circumstances that have brought us to this point

Despite the sorrow, despite the despair

Difficult things are often what is needed to cause us to press in to you

We are sorry that this is what it takes for us to connect with you

Sorry because it is painful

Sorry because of what we miss out on in the meantime

So much self-centred sorry

And sorry because of the grief our self-centred sorry brings to you

Teach us to see past the difficult, the painful, the despair

To see you

To see your love for us

To see your care for us

Forgive our inward focus, our self-centredness

Help us to fix our focus on Jesus

Who in the midst of pain and despair looked past it all to see you

We bring our personal confessions before you now

May we know the deep, personal forgiveness of God, who sees our hearts and loves us nonetheless.

Amen

Reflection

The Peace

Reading Mark 8:22-30

Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida

²² They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on

him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?"²⁴ And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking."²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Message Trees, walking

God who knows our deepest desires, grant us insight as we delve into your word today. Let us have soft hearts and willing ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to us. Amen.

Have you ever felt like you had to settle for second best? You've put everything in and it just wasn't enough. Perhaps it was the house you couldn't afford, the car you really wanted, the overseas trip you dreamed of. And instead you got the lesser house, the family car instead of the sports car, a trip around the South Island instead of one to the Caribbean.

There could be a hundred reasons why second best was the final choice. Some may even argue that those reasons make it the best choice. But you will always regret not holding out for the best. You might have made the most of it all. Decided to totally enjoy what you have and forget about the rest. But deep down it will always be second best.

I wonder how often we have settled for second best with God. I could see this going several ways. Here are a couple. The first is God calls us to something and we look at it and decide that it is too hard. Examples of this could be being called into ministry of some kind, maybe overseas mission. Or perhaps a call to study and develop a God-given passion for something. Then we look at how things are and it is too difficult. What about the kids, my job, how will I pay for it, where will it lead? And so we settle back into second best.

The second is that God begins something with us and we take it as if it is the finished item and run off before it is complete. Examples could be becoming a leader in a youth group then rather than seeing it through, turning to the next exciting thing on the menu. Or finding God drawing you into prayer and rather

than allowing it to develop and grow becoming focussed on the surface of the prayer rather than the relationship it could create with God. And so we settle back into second best.

With that in mind, I want to focus on the blind man at Bethsaida. There is so much here. A quick summary first.

The blind man was brought to Jesus – we don't know, but the impression is that he didn't come of his own accord.

Jesus led the man out of the village.

Jesus did something and he could see people but they were like trees walking.

Jesus did something again and he could see clearly.

Jesus sent him home, telling him not to go through the village.

Now it's pretty easy to see where I may have got the, 'second best from.' Of course, he could have run off excited that he could see trees walking. That on its own would be an amazing miracle and we would all be excited by it. But let's look a little closer, because there are a whole raft of opportunities to come off second best here.

First, he met Jesus. For most of us, meeting Jesus has been a transformative experience. It's amazing! I met Jesus. My life will never be the same again. He could have rushed off, well, be led by the hand, and been happy that he met Jesus – a story to tell his grandchildren. 'Hey kids, did I ever tell you of the time I met Jesus?' And you know, and I know just how much he would have missed out on if he had left it at that. I wonder if any of us have had that experience. We've met Jesus, and it has simply become a story we can tell our grandchildren, never knowing what might have happened if we had followed where Jesus led us.

Which takes us to Jesus leading the man out of the village. Why did he do that? And why did he tell the man afterward to not go back to the village?

Continuing with my theme it strikes me that this has a lot do with the influences that cause us to hold back from choosing the very best. Often it can be those who love us and who often want the best for us as they see it, who get in the way of our very best. We all know of the stories of the person who wanted to cook or design or build or whatever you choose to put in the sentence and who was told they should choose something safer. And I wonder how many potential missionaries and servants of the Gospel have been lost to the church because they were urged to choose a safe career rather than what

God was calling them into. I wonder if the Māori would have discovered Aotearoa if they chose the safe option. Or if John Knox would have founded the Presbyterian church if he had listened to the wise people around him. What might have happened if Jesus had listened to the disciples and decided to not travel on to Jerusalem? Sometimes the village around us, intent as they are to care for us, hold us back from God's very best. Bears thinking about.

Then Jesus put saliva on the man's eyes – very Covid unfriendly – and laid his hands on him and asked if he could see. I can imagine it now, 'O my goodness! I can see. It's amazing. Praise God.' How might it have been to be that man in that moment? I wonder if some people with advanced cataracts might have a similar experience, but I really don't know. Have you ever noticed how quickly we grasp on to small things that seem large in the moment? Rather than seeing them in a larger context we get excited about the small things. To some extent it is human nature because the big things can seem overwhelming. Tell me 4.5 million people have died from Covid-19 and my mind says, 'Amazing!' and moves on. Tell me my neighbour might have Covid-19 and the world could be coming to an end. The risk for this man was that he would see trees walking and think the job was done. And in doing so, miss out on the best that Jesus had for him.

Then Jesus laid hands on his eyes again. Now he could see clearly. What an incredible miracle. We're done, right!? Everything is good to go. No. We're not finished yet. Yes, you can see, but don't leave it at that. We still haven't reached the best. The risk at this point was for the man to be caught in the moment. Have you ever met someone who is constantly telling you stories of things that happened long ago? It reminds me a little of those advertisements for the police that recommended you get better work stories. Stories from our past can help inform and guide our thinking. The problem comes when we allow them to become our thinking. I have met Christians who seem to be stuck in their Bible Class past, or their Billy Graham past, or their Charismatic experience past, or... you get the picture. When we become stuck in our stories we lose sight of the best, because the best is always ahead of us, never behind us. When we begin to think the best is behind us, we lose sight of Jesus who is always calling us on.

And so to the last, Jesus sent him home, saying, "Do not even go into the village." I've already mentioned the village. The thing I want to note here is that for the vast majority of us, our best is based where we are. Even if we look

behind us and think we may have missed some great stuff, our best is here, where we are now. Some of us may be led on from here to other places. But it begins at home. God most definitely has a best for each one of us. Don't settle for trees, walking!

We Pray

We come before you, God
Some of us comfortable where we are
Some of us decidedly uncomfortable
Some of us looking back at a best we think is behind us
Some of us wondering if we ever had a best
All of us with a best always before us
Help us today to find our best in you. To keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and always striving to follow the call you have placed on each of our lives.
In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Lord I lift your name

Rick Founds

Lord I lift your name on high
Lord I love to sing your praises
I'm so glad you're in my life
I'm so glad you came to save us

You came from heaven to earth to show the way
From the earth to the cross my debt to pay
From the cross to the grave
From the grave to the sky
Lord I lift your name on high

Offering

Loving God, Jesus taught us "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." We offer our gifts to you knowing they are part of our treasure, and we do so with the hope that our hearts, our actions, and the words of our tongues will likewise follow. We acknowledge that the tongues that praise you are often the ones that hurt you, when we use them to diminish or discount one of your precious children. Guide our hearts, minds, and tongues to the words that bring you joy. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

Poverty

I want to talk about supermarket queues in lockdown. I expect that most of the people watching or reading the service today have reasonable well stocked pantries. Certainly they could go a few days or even a few weeks without needing to go to the to the supermarket. You are in a blessed minority. This is something I had not realised until this last lockdown. It is likely that the majority of people queuing for the supermarket at the beginning of the lockdown were those who live paycheck to paycheck. If you were to look in their kitchen cupboards they would likely have very little in them. Of anything. They probably purchase the bare minimum to get by, not out of habit, but because that is all they can afford. The smallest bump can throw everything out of whack and so, when a lockdown is announced they look at their bare cupboards and decide to go and get what they can while they can. So before you throw shade at people queuing at the supermarket, give a thought to those who have no option, in part because of the stinginess of those who have more than enough failing to ensure those with less have enough to not only survive, but thrive. We will sit with this for a bit.

Mistreatment of women under fundamentalist regimes

Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian. So often it is the religious who claim some divine right to treat women differently than men. In the church they claim the Bible justifies their behaviour. For Muslims, the Koran. Each group have their own excuses for maintaining a patriarchal regime that prevents women and often others from assuming their God-given callings. Jesus clearly had no time for this kind of behaviour (John 11:25-27), and neither should we. We bring our prayers.

Hunger exacerbated by Covid related restrictions

Countries where disasters or war, combined with Covid, malaria, HIV or other diseases mean that food poverty affects far more people than usual.

For ourselves and those we love

All these things we pray in the precious name of Jesus who taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

Will you come and follow me

Graham Maule, John L. Bell

Will you come and follow me

If I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

And never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

Will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown

In you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind

If I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind

And never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare

Should your life attract or scare?

Will you let me answer prayer

In you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide

If I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside

And never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found

To reshape the world around,

Through my sight and touch and sound

In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
In you and you in me.

Benediction and Grace

As we go on from here, may we be a people never satisfied with second best.
May we constantly reach for Jesus and find our best in him.

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.