

Sunday, February 5

John 7:37-46 *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink."* (v.37 NIV)

Jesus talks about "streams of living water" that will flow forth from those who believe in him. Previously, Jesus had used the term "living water" to refer to eternal life in talking with the Samaritan woman at the well (4:10), but here he has reference to the Holy Spirit. The two go together, of course, because the Holy Spirit brings eternal life; but, at this point in the Gospel, the Holy Spirit had not been given to Jesus' followers.

Verse 39 tells us that the Spirit had not been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified, probably referring to his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The fullness of the Holy Spirit depended on Jesus' prior work of salvation.

For the last 2,000 years, the Spirit has been available to those who believe in and follow Jesus. Do we live as ones to whom the Holy Spirit has been given? Are there streams of living water flowing forth from us to others? I recently heard a young man say, "I've been a Christian all my life. Yet, I have just now really come to know the Lord. I had thought I knew him, but now I know that what I knew was just a rumor." Are we living in the Spirit, or just with a rumor of Jesus?

Isaiah 57:14-21; Psalms 93, 96; Hebrews 12:1-6

Include in your prayers: Our country; for wisdom and guidance for our leaders and the leaders of all nations; for our armed forces and their families, especially those now in danger and any continuing to struggle, including Cameron Fraser; for our enemies; for peace – especially in Ukraine, justice and reconciliation in all places where there is conflict, especially among the peoples of the Middle East; for Haiti and Bondeau; and for Todd and Patsy McGregor and their work with SAMS training missionaries.

Monday, February 6

Mark 9:30-41 *They left that place and passed through Galilee.* (v.30a)

Typical of the Gospel of Mark, today's lesson moves us quickly from one scene to another. We first have Jesus teaching his disciples and forecasting his Passion; then the disciples are arguing about who was the greatest; next, Jesus is using a little child to demonstrate that whoever welcomes little children welcomes him; and, finally, Jesus is telling his disciples not to stop a man who is driving out devils in his name. The reading might be called "A Day in the Life of Jesus."

We can be confident that a day in the life of Jesus was filled with the variety of happenings that occur in our reading. He would have been constantly besieged by his disciples to know more about who he was and what was expected of them in following him. He would have been hounded by the people to see his miracles and to experience his healings.

We who call ourselves Christians are Jesus' people in the world today. What he would do if he were physically present on earth, we are to do. As we think about a day in the life of Jesus, we need to ask ourselves about a day in our life. Is it filled with showing forth Jesus' love and healing to those around us? If not, what will we do today to make it so?

Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 80; Galatians 6:11-18

Include in your prayers: Ricardo Acuña, Rick Anderson, Kay Bailey, Liz Bardin, Jeff Barthels, Elizabeth Bastion, Ray Browne, Bill and Barbara Buttner, Barbara Carlson, Linton and Gloria Chung, Shirley Connell, and Robert Connell.

Tuesday, February 7

Mark 9:42-50 *"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck."* (v.42)

We live in a relativistic age in which sin is not taken very seriously, even by many Christians. There is a mood about that says that the word "sin" has been outdated. The attitude is that we live with too much guilt as it is. Of course, we make "mistakes," but let's not be too concerned about them. Instead, let's affirm our right to do whatever we want to do so long as no one gets hurt.

This all-inclusive attitude has been carried so far that a leader of the Church could say, "God doesn't really take sin all that seriously." To such people, Jesus is love, and love is letting people go their own way and do their own thing.

Our reading for today shows the fatal flaw in that kind of thinking. Jesus uses very strong language here, so that his point cannot be missed. He not only takes sin seriously, but he warns us what will happen if we do not take it seriously. Not only are we in danger ourselves, but we are doubly in danger if our attitudes and actions cause others to fail to see the seriousness of sin.

And real love is "salty" love, tough love, that calls people to their best.

Isaiah 59:1-15a; Psalm 78:1-39; 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Include in your prayers: Ray Constable, Connie D'Alessandro, Dale Dixon, Dave and Marion Downing, Nicholas Ehr, Jim Finell, Fran Ford, George Francis, Dee Garafano, Charlie Gasperino and Kathy Hawken.

Wednesday, February 8

Mark 10:1-16 *Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"* (v.2)

In another demonstration of tough love, Jesus condemns divorce. Again, the prevailing attitude today is not to take divorce very seriously. Many couples live together before getting married (what the Bible calls fornication) and "divorce" (that is, go their separate ways) before ever getting married in the first place.

Studies show that people who live together before getting married, and then do get married, are more likely to divorce than those who do not live together. What is the reason for this? If two people have had all the benefits of cohabitation without the covenant of marriage, what does the covenant mean to them anyway? A casual attitude about fornication leads to a casual attitude about divorce. Who cares what the Bible says?

We all know of cases where two people came to be at such antagonism toward one another that it was better for them to be divorced, and perhaps now they are happily married. We also know of many cases where the marriage could have been saved if the two people had taken their covenant seriously enough, and now they are either alone or in a worse marriage than the first one was. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Even Christian people who are in a good second marriage will tell you to take divorce seriously. The feelings from that first marriage and toward that partner to the marriage do not end with the divorce, nor should they.

Isaiah 59:15b-21; Psalm 119:97-120; 2 Timothy 1:15—2:13

Include in your prayers: Pam Heatley, Ruth Healey, Tom Henry, Ivan Hirsch, Mary Imle, Cindy Islip, Takashi Ishikada, Jacqui Kapinowski, Carol Ann Lappala, Jeff Lefevre, Shirley Lorenz, Elaine Mariggio, and McGrath-Burnett family.

Thursday, February 9

Mark 10:17-31 *He went away sad, because he had great wealth.* (v.22b)

This story is not so much about money as it is about priorities. Jesus is hinting at his divinity in the first part of the exchange with the rich young man. Only God is good, yet the young man has called Jesus good. Jesus is asking, in a sense, "Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

There is then the matter of keeping the commandments. The young man thinks he has kept them, but as soon as Jesus tells him to go and sell all that he has, he shows that he has not. The first commandment is to love God with all that we have, but this young man obviously loved his money more than he loved God.

Lest we become too judgmental about the young man, we need to realize that we are all rich in something that we probably don't want to give up for Jesus. Or fear that he will ask us to give up.

How, then, can we be saved? As Jesus tells his disciples, "All things are possible with God." We can't get our priorities right without the grace of God. We can't love God unreservedly without His grace that can allow us to do so. We can't give up the thing or things that stand between us and following Jesus. It is all grace, and it is all gift from God. He is the one who makes all things possible.

Isaiah 60:1-17; Psalms 83, 146, 147; 2 Timothy 2:14-26

Include in your prayers: Bob Montheard and Pam DeFelice, Darcy Munoz, Barbara Nelson, Marie Oberacker, Gene Paasch, Marilyn Pariseleti, Peter Pawlikowski, Jim and Jerre Rannie, Bonnie Rende, and Charles and Kathy Sakin, Dona Scoville, and Elizabeth Sibley.

Friday, February 10

Mark 10:32-45 *"Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."* (v.35b)

John and James want honored places in Christ's kingdom. The disciples undoubtedly thought of the kingdom in earthly terms. The predictions of the Old Testament prophets had been interpreted by the Jews as providing for an earthly kingdom that would relieve Israel from domination by others (at this time, the Romans). James and John wanted positions of authority in this kingdom.

Jesus had just told the disciples once again what was going to happen to him, but they seem unable to believe it. Jesus uses the incident to do a teaching on what Christian leadership is all about. In Christ's kingdom, we are called to be servants. Jesus has given us the example: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve."

James and John were seeking glory without real sacrifice. There is, however, a cost of being a leader in Christ's kingdom.

We saw that in yesterday's lesson, when Christ called upon the rich young man to give up his wealth in order to follow him. And Jesus made no promise about what the young man would get in return.

So it is with us. Though we Christians are friends of God (John 15:15) and heirs of the kingdom (Romans 8:17), we are expected to throw off our royal robes, and wash the feet of others.

Isaiah 61:1-9; Psalm 88; 2 Timothy 3:1-17

Include in your prayers: Howard Smith, Paul Smith, Allison Spencer, Rob Steiner, Roger Thomas, Phil Toren, Bill Unger, Keith van Cleave, Lori Watts, Debbie White, Wendy Williams, Peter and Mirabelle Wrist, and Bunny Wullschlegler.

Saturday, February 11

Mark 10:46-52 *Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"* (v.48)

Over the last several days, we have seen many instances of spiritual blindness on the part of Jesus' followers. They have argued about who was the greatest. They have failed to understand Jesus' statements about what was going to happen to him (his Passion). They have tried to stop someone who was doing good in Jesus' name. They have rebuked people who wanted to bring little children to him. They have sought places of honor.

In today's lesson, we see physical blindness. Just as Jesus can heal physical blindness, he can also heal spiritual blindness, and spiritual blindness is the more serious illness by far.

So, what do we learn from Blind Bartimaeus? We learn not to let others, even other Christians, divert us from getting Jesus' healing help in our spiritual as well as physical needs. There are those who would discourage us because we ask for too much. There are those who don't want us to get our hopes up and then be disappointed. They may mean well, as the disciples undoubtedly did in some of the instances above, but Jesus always wants more for us.

When you need help, let Bartimaeus be your example. Don't let others rebuke you; shout all the more.

Isaiah 61:10—62:5; Psalms 87, 90; 2 Timothy 4:1-8

Include in your prayers: Ana, Andrea, Brandon, Clay, Debbie, Emmie, Katherine Margarite, Leslie, Linda, Marguerite, Marty, and Verity.

by Harry C. Griffith

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