

“It Begins by Recognizing the Servant is the King”

based on Mark 10:46-52, Isaiah 52:6-8, 12-15, and 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14-21

Delivered on March 14, 2021 at Absecon Presbyterian Church by Drew Mangione, pastor.

Recently, I've enjoyed watching the members of our Mission-Evangelism Committee in action. They have assembled a team of volunteers to help a family mired in a major crisis. This team has created a schedule to help meet the pressing needs of this family, most of which involve finding reliable transportation for work and services. This is all so the family can keep their new apartment and build a better life. Escaping poverty is a nearly insurmountable task these days, but this team has stepped up to serve how they can and do whatever God calls them to do right now to be a part of the solution for this family.

Now, a cynic might look at this and wonder, *'for what purpose are they doing all this?'* And there is valid reason to ask such a question from a worldly perspective, after all, there are no guarantees. Indeed, there could be a great deal of time, money and effort spent on a family such as this. At the end of it all, they may not be any better off than they are today. It might seem logical then to not dive in too deep, so that all that time, money and effort are not wasted. The worldly optimist might say, *'but what if it pays off?'* It's worth taking the chance, just in case, because if it does pay off, then wow! How incredible would that be?!

But I submit to you, that for a follower of Christ, it is neither cynicism, nor optimism, that should motivate us. Rather, as the scriptures show us, our calling is to serve a King, our King who served us by dying for us. You see, as we've been seeing with these covenants, God should really just give up. Humanity keeps falling away. God makes covenants, but the people cannot hold up their end of the deal. Yet God keeps coming through for them and calling the people back.

And so, the follower of Christ is called to service. We are called to service to the God who never gives up, and so we are called to love and serve with patience, kindness and endurance, in response to the King who calls us, who loves and serves us, and who died for us.

Today, we will again look at Jesus through the lens of an Old Testament covenant. This time, it is the Davidic Covenant, the promise that God makes to David. You see, when David was finally comfortable as the King of Israel, he decided it was time to build a house for God, a permanent temple. But instead, God said David would receive a house, meaning a dynasty, in the promise of an heir who would rule forever.

Solomon's dedication and prayer, which we read today, pick up on three important ideas. The first of these is his reference to this promise made to David, this covenant to have an heir on the throne forever. But the second is this promise in light of servant language, both God's people as servants, but also these great Kings, both David and Solomon, embracing the title servant. *'Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord, Yahweh, my God, heeding the cry and the prayer your servant prays to you.'* The great King David who united the nation of Israel, and the great King Solomon who built its temple, are known not as gods themselves, like the Pharaoh in Egypt, or Caesar in Rome and the empires. They seek to be known not as gods, but as lowly servants.

The third idea for us to consider is his description of the temple as the dwelling place of God, and the admittedly strange idea that the creator would reside within creation, when not even all of heaven and all the earth can contain God's presence, much less, a building commissioned by and built by mortals. Yet, the person of Jesus joins these three ideas together, for he is the fulfillment of God's promise to King David, and like David, he is the servant who came to serve, while also being the ultimate King, the temple who embodies God's presence and power, dwelling in the middle of creation, as God with us.

And so, the story of the blind beggar is one on the outskirts of the city of Jericho, where an outcast, lowly and poor man cries out for help. It is yet another turning point in Mark's gospel, connecting last week's reading—when Jesus said he came not to be served but to serve and give his life for many—to Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem that we celebrate on Palm Sunday, riding on a young donkey, just like David. Except instead of being lifted up on a throne, Jesus will be lifted high on a cross to die on Calvary's hill.

You see, I've talked a lot lately about Mark's use of the 'suffering servant' found in Isaiah, and how Mark is explaining why Christians worship and serve a crucified King. It's a strange idea then and now. In the passage we read from Isaiah, this is also a transition for the prophet, in which we see God promising to speak peace, bring good news – in the Greek '*euangelion*' the same word we translate as gospel in the New Testament. Indeed, God will come to announce salvation and proclaim to Jerusalem that God is King.

But then the prophet begins to tell of the Suffering Servant, who shall be exalted and lifted up, be very high. He tells us that just as the nations saw Israel as appalling, bizarre, and strange, so will those who see the servant, marred and disfigured. Yet, Isaiah says that this servant will sprinkle many nations, meaning to reach those nations, and kings will be silent on account of the servant. Without having been told, they will see him for who he is. Without even having heard about him, they will understand who he is. This is how Isaiah moves from the Lord promising to answer the call, to the suffering servant answering that call for the people, bearing their sins and their sufferings to redeem them, to redeem all of us.

And so, Bartimaeus is our link, because in him we see a man who recognizes Jesus, calling out, '*Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me!*' He sees Jesus for who he is – the fulfillment of God's promise to David – without having been told and understands without having heard, and indeed, his eyes are opened, even before Jesus heals him.

Notice that after Jesus had silenced the demons who saw him as the Holy One of God. After Peter and the disciples proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah, he said not to tell anyone. Then after Jesus asked Peter, James and John to the mountain for the transfiguration, he told them to be silent about what they saw. So, understandably, the disciples had learned that if you call out who Jesus is, you have to be quiet. They tell this man to keep quiet about it, but now Jesus flips the script – sees him, summons him, heals him, and brings him along. This man, who had been an outcast, called 'unclean,' is now on the road with Jesus, a 'highly prized' disciple. (*Bartimaeus in Aramaic means 'son of unclean,' and in Greek, Timaeus means 'highly prized' or 'favored.'*)

Bartimaeus recognizes who Jesus is, he is changed by his encounter, and he then follows Jesus. This is a model for our Christian life, and it begins by recognizing the servant is the king. You see, Mark's gospel is intended for us to be like Bartimaeus and see Jesus, not as a king like Caesar or the Pharaoh, or even a King like David, who were all tasked with wielding power as the world wields it. But Jesus tells the disciples that true power comes in service, and that the power of being a disciple is in service, because the disciples then are following, taking up their cross and walking with him, in partnership down the same road with Jesus.

Friends, Mark is showing us that the Good News of Jesus is the Good News of God. In Jesus, God is our truest partner by sharing in the fullness of our life, dying for us, and rising again to reveal God's renewed creation, by which we share in God's life. In Jesus, God begins a new phase of what the plan has been all along, to have humanity fully reflect the image of God into creation. The salvation we have in Jesus Christ is not intended to merely benefit us with eternal life, but change our minds, turn us around, empowered as God's agents in the world, doing the work of reconciliation through the superpower of love. This is the love of God poured freshly in our hearts when we recognize Jesus, as the embodiment of our God, the sign of God's love, and the promised eternal King, our true God and true King.

Why are we loyal to the king? Because we recognize what the King has done for us, namely that even though we fall short of God's glory, and even though we must repent, meaning we must have our minds changed by God and be turned around to receive God's love, and yes, even though God could give up on us, we are partners in God's work. We are forgiven and called to be subjects of our king now and forever. But what's more, beyond this intellectual or emotional response to knowing God's grace, I have found that almost every longtime churchgoer I've ever known also has a story to tell about the time they saw the love of God in action in their own lives. Most often, this is usually through the love and service of another believer in Jesus, who took the time to care about them in a time of need. These acts of service and caring are what reveal God's love, in a real and tangible way. They build community. They build the church.

The church should be a community, a place where we feel safe to say when we are broken. It should be a place where we give each other the space that is needed to be honest and open. We are not to give appearances of being perfect, but show we are humble servants because we strive to do what we can, when we can, to love and serve others. For indeed, when it starts with us recognizing God in Jesus as our King, and when we lay down our ulterior motives, set down our pride, and enter into each other's brokenness with love, then we find ourselves, indeed our best selves, when we reflect the image of our God and King.

Friends, the church is at its best when it is a community of the King led by His Holy Spirit. This is why work like what the Mission-Evangelism is doing right now is so very important. Even better, they are working as a team. They are loving and serving each other, while they love and serve this family in need of their assistance right now. The church is meant to be a community of people who love and serve, not for accolades, but to love and serve our King, revealing the presence of God to others. This is our calling as individuals, but more so as a community, together, to reveal God's selfless love and God's presence through our words and actions. Amen.

Word Search Puzzle

from WhenWeWordSearch.com (use for free distribution only)
words in a straight line left to right or top to bottom



Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

Mark 10:46-52 (Pastor's Translation) And they came to ***Jericho***. As Jesus was on the way out with his ***disciples*** and a ***considerable crowd***, ***Bartimaeus***, the son of ***Timaeus***, a blind ***beggar***, was sitting along the ***road***. And having ***heard*** that it was Jesus of ***Nazareth***, he ***began*** to ***cry*** out and ***proclaim***, 'Son of ***David***, Jesus, have mercy on me.' And so, many were ***rebuking*** him in ***order*** that he should be ***silent***. But all the more, he kept ***crying*** out, '***Son*** of David, have ***mercy*** on me!' And having ***stopped***, Jesus ***commanded*** them to summon him. And they ***summoned*** over the ***blind*** man, ***calling*** to him, 'Be ***confident!*** ***Arise!*** He summons you!' And having ***thrown*** off his ***cloak*** and ***rushed*** up, he came before Jesus. And ***responding*** to him, ***Jesus*** said, 'What do you ***desire*** I should do?' And the blind ***man*** said to him, '***Rabbi***, that I might ***receive*** sight.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go, your ***faithfulness*** has ***healed*** you.' And ***immediately***, he received ***sight*** and he began following him on the way.