

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Psalm 125

Hebrews 5:1-6

Mark 10:46-52

How desperate are we to have the Lord touch our lives?

“Many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, ‘Son of David, have pity on me.’”

Can you feel the desperation in his voice? Picture the scene. Bartimaeus is blind. His world is one of darkness; one of reliance upon others for his most basic needs. He is reduced to begging – sitting by the side of the dusty road, asking for help from people he cannot see.

But today is a day unlike any other. He’s heard the stories about this Jesus that have been sweeping the countryside – about his authoritative teaching and miraculous cures. This is his great chance, and he’s not going to let it slip by due to embarrassment or fear. He cries out in desperation: “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me!”

He is rebuked by the unseen masses – even beggars have a code of expected behaviour. But Bartimaeus doesn’t care. Perhaps he thinks he has nothing to lose. He cries out again: “Son of David, have pity on me!”

In his desperation he is willing to look silly. In his desperation he is willing to risk the rebukes of the crowd. He is willing to become vulnerable, and risk being ignored or rejected by Jesus.

Have you ever felt like Bartimaeus? Have you ever been so desperate that you were willing to risk embarrassment or rejection? Have you ever been so desperate that you threw caution to the wind, and risked it all?

I imagine one area in which most of us felt a bit like this was in our first fumbling attempts at romance.

Think back to your earliest memories of romantic love – the butterflies, the nausea! Think of the great risks you were forced to take. Perhaps it was summoning the courage to walk over and talk with that good-looking guy across the room. Perhaps it was daring to ask that special girl for a dance. Perhaps it was the first phone call, the first time you asked someone out for a meal. Perhaps it was getting down on one knee, and admitting you wanted to spend your entire life with this woman, and hoping like crazy that she felt the same way.

How long had you been waiting for such a moment? How big a risk were you willing to take? How much embarrassment did you risk if you were turned down? Did you give up at the first obstacle, or did you persist? Were you worried about the opinions of others, and potentially looking like a fool in public? Were you *desperate enough* to take the chance?

If you're like most people, sometimes your adventures in love were a great success, and sometimes you fell flat on your face. Either way your heart was pounding! Either way you were vulnerable, which left little room for a neutral result.

When you fall on your face enough times—in any sphere of life—it can be hard to summon the courage to risk it all again. It takes great desperation to be willing make yourself vulnerable once again.

Now, what would it take for us to feel this kind of desperation in relation to *God*?

As so many saints have said, our life with God is not primarily a matter of following rules, or asking for things, or trying to avoid punishment: at its heart, our life with God is an almighty love affair.

In our comfortable society, so many people—even people of solid faith—often go through life with God more-or-less on the periphery – it's nice to know he's there if things go bad, but we generally do alright on our own thank you very much. Even we priests can be tempted in this regard – talking about God each day, but not actually being caught up in the daring romance of faith.

So what would it take for us to be like Bartimaeus, and be *desperate* in our longing for the Lord, desperate enough to risk looking foolish?

I think the answer lies in the famous quote from St. Augustine that you've probably heard me quote in countless homilies: "You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until we rest in thee." "*You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until we rest in thee.*"

Our culture is described as having a 30-second attention-span, and we are generally able to distract ourselves from our restlessness with so much *stuff*. But every now-and-then... we slow down. Either life forces us to (perhaps because of a pandemic-induced lockdown)—or maybe the grace of God allows us to freely choose to—but every now-and-then we slow down. And when we do, our inherent restlessness has a way of making itself known.

When it does, our temptation is probably to speed up once more. We don't want any of that! But if we are given the grace to sit with it for a while, our answer to the question of "How desperate are we to have the Lord touch our lives?" may start to change.

After Bartimaeus received his sight, we are told that he immediately followed Christ on his way. Where else would he go?

Perhaps we are afraid of what *really* following Christ might mean. It may upset our comfortable lives; it may disturb our established routine. But in the end, it's what we most desperately want, because it is our catalyst into the greatest love affair we will ever know.

How desperate are we to have the Lord touch our lives?

Bartimaeus had an answer. What's yours?