

<b>HYMNS:</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>“Lord of creation, to you be all praise!”</b>
	<b>18</b>	<b>“Be still and know that I am God”</b>
	<b>563</b>	<b>“O Jesus, I have promised, to serve you to the end”</b>
	<b>459</b>	<b>“Captain of Israel’s host, and Guide”</b>

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**READINGS: Hebrews 7:23-28**  
**Mark 10:46-52**

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### ***“FOLLOWING JESUS”***

I am a student minister and many of you know that I go to Birmingham every few weeks to pursue my training. A few weeks ago I was away for the first training weekend of my second year. Student ministers from various church backgrounds - Anglicans, Methodists, Pentecostals, and independent church students, around 30 of us, gathered together, excited to see each other again.

As we met for our first session the lecturer suggested that we needed some kind of icebreaker to get us started. She gave us a piece of paper with about 10 questions printed on it and asked us to go round, find a person we hadn't talked to, ask them one of the questions from the paper, and have some conversation together. It was something like doing a speed dating with ministers.

The questions were simple enough but the answers were fiendishly difficult: questions such as, “What was the most regrettable mistake you’ve ever made?” You wouldn’t want to talk about your life-changing mistake to someone you talk to for the first time. Or questions like: “If you could be somebody else for a day, who would you choose to be?” Or again: “If you could turn the clock backwards, what age would you want to be?” That’s an interesting question especially on the day when we have actually turned our clocks backwards. Perhaps the answer we can all give today is: “Thank you Lord for an extra hour in bed.”

The question most frequently put to me was this: What do you love the most?” I didn’t know what to say really. How would you answer this question? Would you say, “I love Jesus the most? or I love my partner the most? or I love my job the most?” Well, out of blue, I said, “I love English idioms.” and added, “I love them, because, I think, they are so British, very subtle, non-directive, witty, but never fail to express your opinions.”

I think English idioms are wonderful. They are deeply rooted in the British way of life and thinking – all of which makes them extremely hard to be translated in to another language. For example, how would you translate the English idiom that suggests that someone is ‘a sandwich short of a picnic’ to someone who’s never been on a picnic with or without a sandwich? Korean is my first language. Perhaps, as a Korean, I should talk about someone being ‘a salmon short of a sushi?’ And if I were from West Africa, I might just talk about someone who was all jollof rice but no chicken.

English idioms are so rooted in British culture and way of life that it's really difficult to translate their meaning into another language, really hard to preserve their spirit and nuance. But I love them because they make me wonder, or else they help me to see things in a different and challenging way.

Some Bible stories are similar to English idioms in that they require readers to understand the world as it was when they were written. This morning we've heard one such story; the healing by Jesus of the blind man named Bartimaeus who was sitting by the roadside in the city of Jericho.

Jesus was on his way out from Jericho heading towards Jerusalem where he was going to face the last days of his life. His disciples and a large crowd as usual were following him. It was a poignant moment in Jesus' life and worth pausing for a moment to consider how it fits in to Jesus' life and the overall narrative of Mark's gospel.

It's worth noting that nobody up to this point had truly seen who Jesus was. And this includes his disciples, his closest friends. Jesus'd repeatedly told them but they didn't understand what he came to fulfil in his life. Peter, hearing Jesus talk about the suffering, rejection, and even death he must suffer, simply refused to believe him. Peter rebuked Jesus, because he couldn't understand how the Messiah, the promised king would suffer and be killed by others. The other disciples lined up with Peter. They just didn't get what Jesus was telling them. Totally misunderstood who Jesus was, John and James, the two brothers, asked Jesus for the highest place when he comes in to his glory, when he becomes, in their thoughts, the king of the world.

Ironically, it was Bartimaeus, the blind man, the man who couldn't see, was the first person in Mark's gospel who was truly able to see, who saw and understood who Jesus was and what it might mean to follow him. And this makes the healing of Bartimaeus and the way it was presented in Mark's gospel more than simply a healing story.

We might have different reactions to the miracles performed by Jesus but surely nobody would disagree that his healing ministry involved not only physical healing but also with the social and spiritual status of the person's life. And that's how it was for Bartimaeus.

Bartimaeus, the blind man, forced to beg because of his disability, heard that Jesus was coming to Jericho. He seized his opportunity. When he heard a large crowd passing by, he shouted out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus heard him. He stopped and asked Bartimaeus to spell out what he wanted. "I want to see again," he declared and, no sooner had he spoken than he regained his sight and set about following Jesus. He threw off his cloak, probably the only thing he possessed, and joined the crowd following Jesus. He was ready to give his all and everything he had to follow his master.

Bartimaeus must have had spent so many days dreaming about being able to see again and imagining the things he could enjoy if only he was able to see. But, when his dream was fulfilled, when Jesus did actually open his eyes, all he wanted to do

was to follow Jesus. On the day he met Jesus, all of his previous dreams were replaced by a dream of following Jesus. This spontaneous and immediate decision to follow Jesus is both radical and shocking.

Indeed it challenges us to do the same, to see and to understand just who Jesus is, and, even as he makes his way to suffering, rejection and death in Jerusalem, to be ready to follow him as he makes his way.

What does it actually mean to know Jesus and follow him?

The crowd who followed Jesus including his disciples already knew that Jesus was a great teacher, a popular community leader. They knew that his teachings were so radical and different that they stirred the religious conventions and social norms. Jesus seemed to have the potential to be the greatest leader of all time. Surely knowing this was enough. Of course they must follow him.

But Mark seems to be implying that Bartimaeus found something even more compelling. Just what was it then that Bartimaeus saw in Jesus which the others failed to see? Mark is asking us to think hard about what else we ought to see in Jesus, what more we need to know about Jesus that might lead us, as it did to Bartimaeus, to follow him.

Whilst I was preparing this sermon, I had to ponder long and hard on these questions.

It is easy to criticize the disciples for their inability to see the things Jesus was telling them. But, the things that Jesus was telling them were not easy to see or accept. Betrayal, suffering, and death? Nobody wants to experience them in life. It would be much easier to pretend that they are not there, but talk only about the happy parts of our life. But Jesus wants them to know and see how the true purpose of his life can only make sense when his suffering, betrayal, and death are taken fully into account. Following Jesus may come with things we would like to avoid in our lives. And it may involve giving things up which we are rather attracted to in our lives.

The call of Christ is not always easy to understand or to follow. True discipleship can demand and cost everything we have in our life. However, Jesus was not calling people into a world of despair. Jesus was telling them not only of betrayal, suffering and death, but also of a resurrection that lay beyond the afflictions of life. Following Jesus would mean following him on his road to Jerusalem with the hope of resurrection.

I began this sermon with an English idiom. So let me finish with another, one I love greatly, the one that talks of “an elephant in the room”. It is so witty and true. When I heard it for the first time, I liked it so much, so I had to google on Wikipedia to find out its full definition. Wikipedia said it is ‘an English metaphorical idiom for an obvious truth that is either being ignored or going unaddressed’. It also applies to ‘an obvious problem or risk no one wants to discuss’. These can be summarised in one word, ‘disambiguation’.

'Disambiguation' is a wonderful word. It seems to summarise so well what Jesus was doing most of time. In almost every place he went, he was able to enlighten others by pointing out one elephant after another in one room after another, whether it was something to do with religion or politics or simply people's way of life with its social, ethical and moral implications.

And Jesus can do the same for us; here; now. He can challenge our faith and point out the elephant in the room in our life and in our world, the things we perhaps are reluctant to talk about or prefer even to deny.

It's important for us to ask ourselves where we would situate ourselves in the story of Bartimaeus which we've heard this morning.

With James and John, the disciples who asked Jesus to place them higher than others? Or with Bartimaeus who so desperately needed Jesus, who so passionately wanted to be able to recover his sight but, more than that, to see and understand just who Jesus truly is? Jesus is still calling us and asking us what we want him to do for us. We should tell him, just as Bartimaeus did, what our needs are. We should spell out our need to see, to understand, and to be ready to follow.

Or are we like those crowds who were already following Jesus? Jesus is still pointing at people, the neglected and the voiceless like Bartimaeus, an elephant in the room in our own world. Just like Jesus asked the crowd to bring Bartimaeus to him, Jesus is inviting us to work with him to bring those who are in need to him and help them to build a better life. There are plenty of examples in our world today. So many people suffer from poverty, by human trafficking, corporate corruption, climate change, hunger, and violence. Millions of people are crossing the sea for a better life risking their lives.

Wherever we find ourselves in the narrative, Jesus still challenges us and makes us wonder how better to live our life; he is still calling us to know him, to know him more nearly, to love him more dearly and to hear him more clearly. And then to follow him. God help us.

May God help us continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.