

Toss Aside the Cloak

Jeremiah 31: 7-9

Mark 10: 46-52

Rev. Donna Vuilleumier

Jeremiah 31: 7-9

For thus says the Lord: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel." See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Mark 10: 46-52

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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Scott had a heartbreaking childhood. His alcoholic father abandoned the family when he was in first grade, and at the age of eight, he watched his mother die from pancreatic cancer. Scott went to live with an aunt, uncle and cousins in the Midwest where he was settling in and was being well supported in the loss of his family, friends, home and school, until his father reappeared and brought Scott back to the east coast. Again, he settled in with a new family as his father had remarried, so he had a new school, new friends. His father worked crazy hours and Scott was often left with his stepmother and two stepsisters. This was a relationship that he could describe as being a 'boy Cinderella,' as his stepmother made it clear she was not happy that he was there and often reminded him that "I don't know what to do with a boy."

It is not surprising that Scott found his way into the 'wrong' crowd, and began using drugs and alcohol to feel good, to cover the emotional pain. Although very intelligent he barely made it through high school. He worked a string of jobs, moved from place to place, had brief dating relationships, as he drifted along from one high to the next. His relationship with his father was strained and at times, estranged. Scott was torn between wanting a relationship with his parent, yet not with who this person was.

I first met Scott when he was released on bail after being arrested for possession of 'heroin with an intent to distribute,' --charges that were later dismissed. His father had paid the bail money but then made it clear that he was done with his son unless he got clean and sober. This started a series of rehab stays that were half-hearted at best, and he would leave AA or

Narcotics Anonymous meetings to get high. I learned the sad fact that it takes an average of seven rehabs for sobriety to be successful. Over this time his father again walked away in 2013, wanting nothing to do with such “a dead, and hopeless loser junkie.”

Finally at his rock bottom, Scott sought to prove he was not what his father believed him to be. He took inspiration from his father’s searing rejection and for the first time, he seriously entered rehab and worked with the program, the counseling, the opportunities. After more than two years of clean living and sobriety, he visited his father to show him who his son really was, but the reception was not what he expected. His father rejected him, doubting that he was sincere, or even capable. Scott turned, rejected his father, and moved on.

Now, six years later, his father is the one long lapsed back into a world of drugs and alcohol, and Scott continues a clean, sober life. He became a commercial fisherman, and for one season, he worked aboard one of the fishing vessels for the National Geographic TV show, *Wicked Tuna*. He embraced the AA spirituality, finding and sharing hope, comfort and strength in his Higher Power. He expected to be transformed, and he was. His Higher Power led him on a straight path over which he did not stumble, with weeping and consolations for all that he had not truly grieved in his youth. Through his Higher Power he took heart and was made well.

When Scott was truly ready to be made well, when he was able to say for himself that he wanted to live a life free from drugs, free from addiction, he found the faith to make him well. He threw off the cloak of dependency upon mind-numbing chemicals, and the cloak of dependency upon being a victim of his own life. He no longer needed to be wrapped in a cloak that showed the world what he could not do. He threw off his old way of life that no longer fit him, that no longer defined him.

When Bartimaeus was truly ready to be made well, he saw Jesus for who he was, even before his eyes were opened again. Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was almost denied the opportunity to be healed as the crowd attempted to stifle his cry for help from the one, he recognized to be the Messiah, the Son of David. He called out for mercy, to be led back and no longer left behind, to come home by divine grace and action. As soon as Jesus called to him, he threw off his cloak, and came to Jesus, ready to be healed, ready to see again, ready to follow Jesus.

Many times before in his ministry, Jesus had taught that to be a follower, you must be willing to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him, and Bartimaeus did exactly that, even before his faith made him well.

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As we hear the healing story of Bartimaeus we can easily imagine the jubilant scene as if we were eyewitnesses. It is easy to overlook that he had quickly tossed aside his cloak, yet this action is a story, a healing, in itself. For someone who lived as the poorest of the poor and on the margins of society, the cloak, just a simple and perhaps threadbare garment, was all that Bartimaeus possessed. It was his shade from the hot sun, it was his warmth on a cool evening, it was his blanket as he slept, and during the day it was his beggar’s bowl as he sat by the city gate. It was a symbol of the status and power that he did not have, yet it represented everything that he owned. Bartimaeus became a radical disciple who cast away his only valuable belonging. The blind beggar who once sat on the side of the road now followed Jesus down the road to Jerusalem. By faith, by spiritual intuition, Bartimaeus found not only healing, but a calling as well.

He threw off the cloak of dependency upon others for the most basic essentials in life--including compassion, and the cloak of dependency upon being a victim of his own life. He no longer needed to be wrapped in a cloak that showed the world what he could not do. He threw off his old way of life that no longer fit him, that no longer defined him. He expected to be transformed and he was.

As we hear the healings of Bartimaeus, and of Scott, do you have a cloak that you want to toss aside? Is there a comfort zone, a habit, a mindset, an attachment, that stops you from really seeing and from truly following the ways that Jesus calls us to do? Until you can toss aside your cloak, you cannot really see, and you cannot be truly free to follow Jesus on the way. Amen.