

A ransom for many: Mark 10.32-52

The healing springs at Jericho, oldest (continually-inhabited) city in the world — just outside the aptly-named Temptation Gift-Shop. And a group of Syrian Christian children, carrying the cross in their daily procession through the narrow streets of Jerusalem. Do remember them in your prayers — it's not easy being an Arab Christian in Jerusalem today. Thanks to Robin for today's TFTD.



Blind Bartimaeus knew the Kingdom of God when it passed through his town. He cried out for mercy and when Jesus summoned him to the front of the crowd and asked him what he wanted, Bartimaeus knew what to say. *'My teacher, let me see again.'* And Jesus said, *'Go, your faith has made you well.'*

So a blind man sees even as the disciples fail to understand.

It is tempting to see the contrast between Bartimaeus confidently reclaiming his sight and the disciples who are amazed and afraid and unable to fully grasp where Jesus is taking them even though he has spelled it out to them.

But we are comparing apples with pears if we compare the faith of Bartimaeus and the faith of the disciples.

Bartimaeus has faith in Jesus' power to heal and lead him into the Kingdom of God. The disciples also have faith in Jesus' power to heal and they too rejoice at seeing the Kingdom proclaimed. What they are struggling with is the concept of discipleship which Jesus is seeking to explain to them.

The kingdom and discipleship are not the same.

I wonder whether one of the things that attracts us to the Kingdom is a vision of the leading role we will play in it? Do we like the idea of Jesus being King so we can be princes? Do we imagine that as the blind receive their sight, the first thing they will see after Jesus himself is our glory as we sit at the right-hand side of Christ and on his left?

James and John already knew they were special disciples. Along with Peter they had been privileged to see the raising of Jairus' daughter and the Transfiguration. If they had been following instructions, they would have kept both of these experiences secret from the other disciples. More recently they had seen Peter getting into debates with Jesus. Did they think Peter might have been falling out of favour? Is that why they seized their chance to ask Jesus to make a promise that they would be seated on his right and on his left when he came into glory?

Jesus points out to them that they do not know what they are asking. And he asks them: Can you drink the cup I will drink? Can you accept the baptism I have accepted? Yes, yes they say. And Jesus affirms that they will indeed be faithful disciples who will follow Jesus in the way of the cross, but actually, the positions on the left and on the right have already been assigned.



We wonder whether this is a reference to the two bandits who were crucified with Jesus (Mark 15:27). Which would also point towards the understanding that it is in the cross that Jesus comes into glory and not on some mortal throne.

Disciples of Christ who imagine themselves as Princes of the Kingdom of God do not drink of the same cup as Jesus and are not baptised into the same baptism. The kingdom they seek is a false dawn. At some point their desire for glory will lead them away from the kingdom they seek.

In the Kingdom of God whoever wishes to be the first among many must be the slave of all. In this Kingdom, anonymous bandits will suddenly be given pride of place and a blind man shouting from the back of the crowd will be called to front and asked to define the Kingdom for himself.

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and those called to follow as disciples of Christ have to accept that they are servants too. The way of the cross is to

drink of the same cup as Christ which may even lead to suffering so that others will be set free.

In the Eucharistic prayer we most commonly use at 10am services at St Philip & St James, the priest says, '*drink this all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.*' These words echo the words of Jesus in Mark 10:45. '*The Son of Man came ... to give his life the ransom for many.*' In our prayer we remember that Jesus gave his life to ransom us. But what Jesus is saying to James and John is that they too are called into this sacrifice in order that many many many will be set free.

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