

I love good novels, stories well written and constructed. As a schoolboy I got engrossed in detective fiction, I loved trying to spot the clues... the hints that told more than they did at first sight.

From an early age I was suspicious of the happy ending... all too neat... and from what I could see, it was rare that after marriage anybody lived happily ever after... so when approaching scripture for the first time.. I was keen to look at the clues, to read behind the text... to see what was being said [and what wasn't]. I loved meeting those fragments of text which had been knitted together... trying to make a complete narrative out of the experience which was not yet complete, but was inviting us to complete with God, weaving the fragments of our lives into a greater text and a greater story.

It's why the happy ending to Job is not quite right... it was added later... the original seems to have needed something more allusive... less concrete and easy... So I am glad that it has been paired with the Gospel today... the seemingly innocent story of the healing of a blind man...

Scholars tell us that Mark was the first written down account of the life of Jesus... Matthew and Luke used it as a framework for their versions of the life of Jesus, often adding details... or correcting the Aramaic to posher Hebrew, or explaining what was going on for a different audience perhaps not so knowledgeable about the culture... That is always what makes the studies interesting... what is mentioned and what isn't...

And what has happened just before... In this case a bit of a bust up between the disciples about who was more important, who might have power when Jesus came into his kingdom? For us who know the rest of the story it was clear to see the misunderstanding, confusion, misplaced ambition and lack of foresight. In a nice editorial twist... we have the story of a blind man following

on... Gettit?... the disciples are blind... so let's see what Jesus does with blindness... will they see or not... blindness of heart and mind not just the physical... There is a story being told... and if we have ears to hear and eyes to see we are invited to hear beyond the text and see beyond our lives to another meaning and another life.

And so we meet Bartimaeus... and that first meeting is full of meaning if we have eyes and hearts ready to see... Where to begin?... There is too much here... so I am just going to scrape the surface of this great story... certainly better than any of the novels I've been reading recently.

Where to begin?... Well he is named? This is really rare... most healed are unnamed... the daughter of the widow of Nain, the centurion's servant, or someone is named but not the healed... Jairus daughter... So naming someone is significant... naming them twice is odd. Bar is Aramaic for son... Timaeus is a name... So Bartimaeus son of Timaeus... or son of Timaeus son of Timaeus. is clearly a clue a hint at something.. In the Ancient world and parts of the Palestinian world to this day... Someone might be given the name of their important father.. Son of Timaeus son of Timaeus... so who was Timaeus?... we know names are important... but we have no idea... when this text was written this meant something. Not now... but then... was he well known? Was he a leader in the Church? Was he healed on the outside... but remained someone who was blind on the inside... he had started following the way... but had he lost his way... who knows... Clearly he was a real person to Mark... to both Matthew and Luke he had disappeared... he has no name with them, and they have no name for him.. Oddly Matthew has two blind people being healed at this stage of the text... both unnamed and it is hard to imagine that Matthew the language scholar misunderstood the Bartimaeus name problem.

They are in Jericho... not to be confused with the one here although both were a hub for the people... this one was on the route from Jerusalem to Egypt, an oasis full of promise and beauty after the desert surrounding it, it had an awesome complex history. It was where Herod had built a summer palace... parts of which are still visible to this day... but the son of Timaeus is not in the nice bit... he is in the gutter.. Jesus was leaving the city... not there to stay... too much to do... and son of Timaeus cries from the gutter on hearing it was Jesus of Nazareth... help he is leaving, have I missed the chance, is my moment gone/... is it all too late/... am I lost and blind for ever?

How on earth could Jesus leaving mean anything to him... what did he know about Jesus, and how?... so much in the text is hidden or alluded to... there is more here than a surface reading.

As not only blind, but a beggar he knows he needs help. Clearly he has no one to help him... he is by himself... And there is a hint that people didn't want to encourage him either... his name means to honour, but it is clear that there is no honour here. The only other Timaeus which springs to mind is in Plato's dialogue of Timaeus and Socrates...

At first the crowd try to silence him... and then once Jesus notices him and says *Call him...* the crowd change their tune and say... *Take heart Rise, he is calling you...* Popular opinion and the crowds are fickle beasts... it could have been that Jesus did not hear above the crowds and then they would have said 'lose heart, stay where you are there in the gutter... he can't hear you'... But Jesus then as now, hears the call of those calling from the depths of their pain and their distress and says to us now as he said then 'Take heart, Rise up, you too are called'.

The text of the Gospels is all about being called, called to move on, to change, to take the opportunity, to be called to love, called to give... to be called to be loved... called to be given to.

Only Mark's version of this story tells us that he threw off his mantle, sprang up and went to Jesus... and it is interesting to consider what is meant by the mantle... it kept him warm and safe... but it also labelled him in his role... and now he was ready... now he needed to move on... daring the new.

Why does Jesus ask him *'what would you have me do for you?'*... it seems a rather stupid question.. Isn't it too obvious... blind man, begging in the gutter. Why ask? You who know everything Jesus...

I work as a therapist and one of the key things in the therapy process is to enable someone to explore what they really want... not what they think they want... or want now... but beyond that... and to put that into words for themselves. That takes a movement of heart and mind. A change... the belief and hope in a new start.

And the son of Timaeus braved an answer, not wealth, not friendship, not support, or a home.... But sight.. and in that he received insight too. It was the rawness of faith [and his need of Jesus] that restored him... and he became a disciple... he followed him on the way..

Like all good writers, Mark was not just telling the story, recording the events... he needed it to speak beyond those events to his community years later... ideas that would nest in their minds and their souls... seeds that would flourish and grow, themes that would spring up when they needed courage to go on, details that would help them write themselves into the gospel story as we still do two thousand years later..

We are here, like Bartimaeus, so often in the gutter... despite the glories of Jericho... or Magdalen about us... we too seek clarity... a vision for our journey... we too call out and are heard and the response is that we are called to love, called to give... called to be loved... called to be given to. That is what a Eucharist is about in part...Our experience is brought here...they are just like the gospel story fragments for our journey... but now also fragments of Christ, of broken bread and poured out wine, body and blood... but through them we see a glory which is yet to be fully realised when our eyes are finally healed, and we see the Lord.