

ORDINARY SUNDAY 30 2009

In the name of the Father....

There is a true story about a woman who graduated from graduate school in Pittsburgh and was looking for a part-time job. She read a newspaper which listed an administrative position with a soup kitchen. That looked interesting, so she clipped it and prepared for the interview. On the day of her interview, she put on a dark blue business suit, put together a manila folder full of resumes and references, and clipped back her hair.

Arriving a few minutes before noon, she saw the sign: "East End Cooperative Ministry." She knocked on the door. Someone inside said, "It's unlocked." She went in, only to find a long line of people in front of her. Disappointment washed over her. Then she realized it was lunch time. The people in the line weren't there for the interview, they were waiting for soup.

She grew nervous as she looked at the people in line. Some of them, in turn, looked at her. She felt self-conscious about the way she was dressed. Apparently others began to sense her anxiety.

A woman in a moth-eaten sweater smiled and tried to make conversation. "Is this your first time here?"

"Yes, it is."

"Don't worry," said the lady in the sweater, "it gets easier."

"The scales fell from my eyes that day," reflected the young woman. "I went there looking for a job, and that woman thought I was there for soup. As far as she knew, the world had been as cruel to me as it was to her. But in the kindest way she could, she welcomed me as a fellow human being. She saw me as someone

equally in need, which I was and still am. I didn't realize it at the time, but that was the day when God began to convert me." Looking around the halfway house, she smiled and said, "You see all of these wonderful things God is doing here? They began when God gave us eyes to see where Jesus was leading us." She went on to establish a halfway house for women who are recovering drug addicts among other things.

Unlike blind Bartimaeus this woman's blindness was not physical but rather spiritual, that was until God opened her eyes. It was only when somebody reached out to her in kindness that she really understood that she was as much in need of help as those she thought she was setting out to help. Bartimaeus, however, was fully aware of his needs and his weakness and so called out to Jesus as he was passing by so that Jesus would come and help him.

Blindness was a terrible and not uncommon infliction in Jesus' day. Blind people, if they did not have a family to care for them, were generally forced by their affliction to become beggars and to live of the generosity of their community.

Associated was the added stigma that it was commonly thought that serious illnesses such as blindness were a punishment from God for previous wrong doing either by the person afflicted or by one of their parents, grandparents etc. So the blind person not only had problems because of their ailment, but added burden of sin.

Bartimaeus was one such man. He was by his blindness to sit and beg in the streets of his home town Jericho. As far as society was concerned he was a nobody, and outcast, a gutter dweller, the lowest of the low.

As we hear in the story, Jesus and a large procession of followers were in the process of leaving Jericho, when Bartimaeus called out to Jesus.

He said two things. 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy of me!' This is in fact a profound statement of faith. He not only proclaims that he believed that Jesus is the Messiah, but that he also believed that Jesus had the power and authority to help him. Jewish belief taught that the Messiah was to come from the House of the great king David, which is why he uses the title, 'Son of David'. It is a power packed statement.

Bartimaeus was looking for help. He knew that there was nothing which human hands could do for him, so he called out in faith to Jesus believing that he had a much greater power, he had the power of God.

However, Jesus' followers were not so thrilled with this outcast calling upon their teacher. They tell him to shut up. But he continued all the more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Jesus then heard the cries of this man and called him over.

We then hear a very significant line, one which many of us would not have paid attention to: 'He threw off his cloak and sprang up and came to Jesus'. This seems an irrational act. Why would he throw off his cloak? This man has thrown aside all that he has, his cloak, his only covering and the sign of his status. He throws this off and goes at once to Jesus in full confidence that he will be helped. Jesus asks him what he wants.

Master please let me see again.

This man recognised his need and was willing to put aside his last vestige of pride in the hope that Jesus would help him. Jesus says, 'Go, your faith has made you well.'

We are then told, that he regained his sight and he followed Jesus on the way to Jerusalem.

Bartimaeus is for us an example of discipleship. He was willing to put aside his pride and call out to Jesus despite opposition from those around him, and he went and stood naked before Jesus and after receiving his sight followed Jesus.

Many of us live in a world of blindness. Many of us live as if covered by the cloak of our afflictions. Many of us live by the rules and conventions of those around us. Many of us live hiding away our imperfections and too frightened to stand before God just as we are. Many of us prefer to keep on sitting in the gutter of our lives than taking a chance and following Jesus.

But the real power of this story is the faith of this outcast man and his acceptance by Jesus.

Jesus welcomes us all, despite our afflictions, our sins, our problem, to follow him and to live the life he has created for us all, all we need to do is to call out his name and in faith ask to be healed.