

One of the popular photo opportunities when visiting Jerusalem is stopping at the Dominus Flavit church on the Mount of Olives. There's a wide area in front of the church providing an uninterrupted backdrop of part of the old city where you can have your photo taken. **PHOTO 1**

On our last visit in 2022 I was struck with the visual splendour of this scene. The sunlight was glinting off the golden dome you can see here; the deep blue sky contrasted beautifully with the sandstone yellow of the city walls and at the periphery of my sight the green/grey olive tree branches swayed ever so gently in the breeze.

A few feet away from us I saw Karen standing beside Jo describing the view over Jerusalem because she, of course, was unable to see the city. And throughout the trip, **PHOTO 2** Karen did a tremendous job describing events and sites so that Jo knew almost as much as we all did about who and what we were encountering.

And it struck me as I sat down to think through what I was going to say today that Bartimaeus would also have known quite a lot about Jesus, although he had never seen him.

Bartimaeus, sitting no doubt in his usual roadside pitch begging from the many folks who passed him on their way between Jericho and Jerusalem would have known about Jesus. But only from what others had told him. Maybe he had heard that Jesus had spit on to some clay a few weeks before and rubbed it into another blind man's eyes and restored his sight. And maybe he realises that this is his one big chance for his life to be transformed.

Maybe he remembered from the Jewish scriptures that Job's transformation from suffering began only when he became aware of YHWH's presence. That Job's eyes had metaphorically been opened as verse 5 of our Old Testament explained: **PHOTO 3** *I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.*

That's quite a profound statement of faith by Job. In the past Job knew God from what others had said, particularly from the teaching in the synagogue. But now, amidst his misery inducing trials and tribulations he is personally encountering God.

Returning to Mark's gospel - he has already informed his readers in the opening verse that his gospel is about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. So,

we should not be surprised when Bartimaeus calls out *Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me*. Like that of Job, that too is a truly profound statement of faith.

It is also the only occasion in Mark, where Jesus is addressed as such, and as if to emphasise its importance, Bartimaeus calls out, presumably even louder after being rebuked by the crowd, the same plea a second time *Son of David, have mercy on me*.

And just as Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus, so Jesus calls for him. Jesus hears, stands still and simply says *Call him*. Two words which not only presage the transformation in Bartimaeus's life but also immediately change the attitude of the surrounding crowd.

One moment they are shushing a socially insignificant blind man and in the next they are all hail fellow well met. Indeed, their excitement is palpable as they encourage him to cheer up and rise.

I wonder if any of them realised at the time or subsequently, that they were not only witnesses to, but also participating in, an amazing act of grace and mercy.

And Bartimaeus goes for it without hesitation and I think it is hugely significant that Mark records that he casts aside his cloak before approaching Jesus. It's significant because his cloak would have been his most treasured possession because it not only kept him warm through cold nights but equally important would also have been laid out in front of him as the depositary for any coins given in response to his begging.

So, in the act of throwing aside his cloak, there's the symbolic image of someone leaving his former life behind in order to follow Jesus.

And then Jesus asks a most interesting question: **PHOTO 4** *What do you want me to do for you?* I say interesting because, surely, the answer is so blinking obvious. Blind Bartimaeus wants to see. It is so obvious that there must be more to it.

And I think there is because today's reading continues on immediately from last week's reading where Jesus asked the very same question to James and John when they were seeking to be granted prestige and privilege by being given seats of power either side of Jesus when he sat on his throne.

The same question being asked twice in two entirely different circumstances within a very short space of time. Surely, Mark is highlighting something here.

In the first situation Jesus's response was to teach the disciples that anyone who wants to be first must put aside their own needs in order to see to the needs of others; echoing his earlier teaching about the upside-down nature of the kingdom where the last or least will be the first. Here in the second situation, Jesus demonstrates exactly that.

James and John could see, they didn't understand. Unlike Bartimaeus who couldn't see, but did understand and immediately follows Jesus as he travels towards what we refer to as Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

And what about us? Are we currently more like James and John were at that stage, following Jesus for the kudos which might come our way? Or are we willingly determined to follow Jesus despite objections from those gathered around?

And what about our prayers? After all, our prayers often include requests for ourselves. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves if we have any blind spots or are we blind to certain things? Are we like James and John, maybe not realising what it is that we are asking? Or are we 100% clear like Bartimaeus?

If Jesus asked us today, what do you want me to do for you? How would we respond?

Revd. Terry Ward-Hall, 27 Oct 2024