



PASTOR GWEN'S MESSAGE
22ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
"4R'S = 1 REFORMATION"
SUNDAY OCTOBER 24, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Next week our congregation, along with other protestant churches will mark the anniversary of the Reformation. 504 years ago, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Roman Catholic church in Wittenberg Germany. As I have been teaching our young people in confirmation this month, Luther did not want to start a new church. He just wanted to reform the church he grew up in and loved so dearly. He wanted to align the practices of the church with Scripture. Today we are still a church that is reforming and renewing. The world around us is anything but static and the dynamics of the church need to continue to evolve in the image of God and in the likeness of Jesus.

And so, in our crazy world of the 21st century, how do we continue to be reformed to be more like Jesus? I think the answer to that deep question can be found in our simple story of Bartimaeus in today's Gospel reading. So, let's look at our story.

Jesus is in Jericho, with his disciples, on his way to Jerusalem, to the cross. Jesus knows that this is a one-way trip for him as he comes not only to the end of his life, but to the end of His time teaching His disciples. Soon, he will ride on the donkey into Jerusalem and the rest of the crucifixion story is history,

one we know well. But this story about Bartimaeus can be overlooked by those of us who want to hurry on to the three days and Easter morning.

Jesus in Jericho, even among the crowded streets, hears Bartimaeus cry for mercy. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" This cry causes Jesus to stop. He then calls for the blind Bartimaeus to be brought to him. Jesus then asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" The big question gets a resounding answer, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus grants his wish as he says, "your faith has made you well." Immediately, the blind beggar can see again. Bartimaeus then follows Jesus on to Jerusalem, never to be without sight again.

Well, that is simply the story of Bartimaeus. And I think in it we can see great reformation in this short story. We find what a few of my commentaries this week called the 4 R's. The first is for Repentance. Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus, "Lord have mercy on me." This declaration begins his reform. If he has sat silently on the side of the road, mostly likely, this encounter with Jesus would not have happened. Calling on Jesus in this way is a confession that he needs the grace of God in his life. Son of David and teacher are names that signify that Jesus is someone special. And so Bartimaeus calls out to him with a contrite heart, a heart that needed healing, needed reformation. "Lord, have mercy" is his plea, his expression of repentance. A sentence that stuck with me this week was by the Rev Dr Roy Howard. He said, "The cry of genuine faith always rises above the clamor of the crowd." Our cry of faith in God was heard in this sanctuary this very morning in our Kyrie. Remember your response you sang back to me? "Lord, have mercy". Still today these words are our plea for pardon and help to reform our lives.

The second R is request. Bartimaeus' request was that he see again. He simply wanted his sight restored. And in his story, his sight was not only physical but also spiritual. He physically could not see, but he was spiritually made whole again so he could continue and follow Jesus.

This R for me is a tough one. What should we ask for? Why do I deserve a certain healing? Why do I even have the right to ask our Lord for such a thing? Am I good enough to receive such a blessing? Sound familiar I suspect. All too familiar for me in the last several months.

The third R is restoration. Jesus healed Bartimaeus and gave him his sight. He did not have to do anything but ask and believe. Restoration was his gift from Jesus. Some might want to get into the old Lutheran argument here of faith

verses works. But we might save that lesson for Reformation Sunday next week. When we ask God for forgiveness, we repent. That might mean asking God for help as we do some earthly things like make amends with the friend we harmed. Did you ever break a neighbor's window when you were a kid playing baseball in the street? Your parents probably made you go admit your deed, say you were sorry and maybe even pay for replacing the window. That is how our society looks at restoration. But for God, there is no requirement of repayment. For we know that we can never do enough, give enough, be enough to earn forgiveness and reformation from our great God. It is only by his grace we are restored; we are saved.

Our last R is also found in the Bartimaeus story. It is response. Bartimaeus followed Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, to the cross. With the new self-image Bartimaeus received, he chose to follow Jesus on his way. That is what makes the story of Bartimaeus so compelling. Jesus healed many people, even raised a few from the dead, but Bartimaeus was one of the few who responded by following Jesus. Think of it for a minute. Maybe that is one reason Bartimaeus was named in our story today. Peter's mother-in-law, Jairus' daughter, the woman bleeding for umpteen years, and others who were possessed by demons or were lepers barely stopped to say thank you, and certainly did not leave their lives behind and follow Jesus. I would like to think that Bartimaeus even was a witness to the resurrection as he went on to tell his story of how he had a new life in Jesus. In response to his healing, Bartimaeus devoted his life to Jesus.

I do think we would all be well served to give some thought to these 4 R's: Repentance, request, restoration, and response. What a great pattern for reformation. And it is offered to all of us. Christ wants to make us complete, to make us reformed, leaving our past behind and following Him.

This week I read a story told by Rev Will Willimon, an American Theologian and once Bishop of the United Methodist Church:

I was teaching a sixth grade Sunday school class, a wretched age, and was telling them, in as vivid detail as I knew how, of the arrest, trail, and crucifixion of Jesus, how the soldiers carried him away, how Pilate and the people conspired to do Jesus in. A hand went up.
 "Yes, Bradford, what is it now?" "I wanna know where was the rest of them. . . .when things got rough for Jesus?" "The disciples? Oh they were long gone", I replied. "No, the rest of them", he persisted. "Whatever became of all them that he helped, the ones he healed? Now that they had two good legs to walk

on and two good eyes to see, where was they when them soldiers come to get Jesus?" "Well, I don't know, Bradford." "Yeah, you do," the little sinner said softly. "They was just like most folks. They got what they wanted. Now they was gone."

So where are you? Obviously, you are not gone as you are here today. I am glad we are people of the reformation. We are called to be reformed by the body and blood of Jesus. We are ever reforming into the people God made us to be. Jesus is the Lord of our lives and by his grace we can be refreshed when we repent, and request. We will be restored to new life so we too can respond by leaving our past behind and following in joyful obedience our God who loves us so much, he gave his only son to die for us. AMEN