

This is Your Life

11th Weekend of Kingdomtide – August 19/20, 2006

Sermon Background Study

Psalm 113:5-9 (NRSV)

⁵Who is like the LORD our God,
who is seated on high,
⁶who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?
⁷He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
⁸to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.
⁹He gives the barren woman a home,
making her the joyous mother of children.
Praise the LORD!

Mark 10:46-52 (NRSV)

⁴⁶They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” ⁵²Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Does your life have a story? Bartimaeus finds a story for his life when he comes to Jesus.

When I was a young boy, *This Is Your Life* was a popular television show. Each week, Ralph Edwards “surprised” a celebrity on the street and coaxed him or her back to the studio. There, the celebrity would be presented with a red book, a biography of sorts. As the show unfolded, various people from the celebrity’s past would come onstage and tell their part of the story. The public ate it up. The show went on to be as big a hit in the U.K. as in the U.S. The public’s interest in the stories of famous people’s lives continues unabated. The A&E network now has a cable channel devoted to nothing but re-runs of their popular *Biography* series.

Most of us are very interested and at times fascinated with the lives of famous and infamous people. But how about the stories of our own lives? Do we see where our lives are going? Do you sometimes feel like the events of your life have just pushed you along? Do you feel like your life is without a plot?

Son of Timaeus

Today’s is a simple story. Bartimaeus is a blind beggar who sits by the side of the road, cup in hand. When he hears that Jesus is passing by, he shouts out to Jesus, begging for mercy. When he shouts out a second time, Jesus calls him over and restores his sight. This is another of those Jesus stories that tempt us to read quickly onward. But Ellsworth Kalas invites us to stop and take a closer look.¹

Dinner at Jesus’ Table

Two weeks ago we reflected on Holy Communion, the meal that Jesus gave us. Throughout his ministry, Jesus’ invites people, poor and rich, lame and well, to come sit with him at his table. Sometimes Jesus’ invitation is literal, as a lot happens around the dinner table in many Gospel stories. Jesus teaches. He performs miracles. He sparks controversy in merely choosing his dinner companions. At other times, the invitation is figurative, as in today’s story.

Across the NT, meals and tables play a pivotal role. This isn’t too surprising given the importance of meals in the Greco-Roman (and Jewish) world of the first century. Meals were a means of creating and solidifying social bonds in a culture driven by social status. Typically, 10-15 diners would gather in a square or rectangular room. The diners would recline on benches that lined the walls so that each diner faced inward toward the others. (We can forget our mental pictures of tables and chairs!) Diners would be arranged by social rank and good hosts were adept at making such distinctions.

The controversies that swirled around Jesus’ meals were centered on who would eat with whom? By eating with assorted “sinners,” such as tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus deeply offended the sensibilities of the “right-minded” Pharisees. They understood the symbolic significance of Jesus’ dinner partners.

Today’s Scripture reading from Psalm 113 reminds us that God’s invitation has always included the most marginalized members of the community, such as Bartimaeus.

By coupling his choice of dinner companions with his kingdom announcement, Jesus was enacting his proclamation that all would be welcome to take a seat at God’s great banquet.

¹*Life from the Upside: Seeing God at work in the world*, J. Ellsworth Kalas, 2004.

Bartimaeus has lost his health, his livelihood, his reputation, even his name. Because Mark writes that his eyesight was restored, we know that Bartimaeus could at one time see. Now, he has been reduced to begging, having lost whatever means he might have once had of earning a living. Because the ancients, including the Jews, saw blindness and other ailments as indications of God's disfavor, Bartimaeus is an outcast, a person to be avoided and even forgotten. In fact, he has become such a non-person that he has even lost his name. "Bartimaeus" is actually "bar-Timeaus," meaning "son of Timeaus." This was a common way of giving someone a last name of sorts. Thus, Bartimaeus has lost his first name and become about as anonymous as a person can become. In truth, in the community he has become little more than an unnamed blind beggar. More an object than a person.

Finding Purpose through Spiritual Gifts

Would you like to feel truly connected to others at St. Andrew? Do you long to create a meaningful life where spirituality imbues all that you do, and isn't just a portion of who you are? This new St. Andrew Academy course on Spiritual Gifts and how to apply them in many roles and activities, is designed to help Christians naturally connect with God and those they are to serve. Participants will more easily connect with God and others through the use of their gifts, and obtain a stronger sense of direction for their service and themselves. The course combines two proven resources for understanding spiritual gifts and applying them through discovering purpose.

Believers identify their God-given Spiritual Gifts ("what"), Personal Style ("how"), and Ministry Passion ("where"). Our comprehensive approach, called *Network*, includes a 3-step process of

- **Discovery**, helps the believer to discover their God-given Servant Profile (Spiritual Gift, Personal Style, and Ministry Passion). These step-by-step studies assist participants to better understand their place within God's design for serving in the church. A biblical foundation is presented and several self-scoring assessments are used to assist believers in their understanding.
- **Coaching**, provides individualized attention for each server in helping them find an appropriate place of service which reflects who God has made them to be (Servant Profile).
- **Service**, moves people into the practical and God-honoring experience of the "priesthood of all believers," the mission and ministry of the local church.

The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life is designed to help individuals develop a personal Mission statement, Vision statement, and Action Plan to have a clearly defined sense of who they are, where they are going, and why. Through case studies, participants learn eight action steps for getting started and how famous biblical characters recognized and pursued their missions.

Spiritual Gifts has long been one of the most requested Academy topics and we are excited about finally having a top-flight offering. This class will meet on Monday evenings starting September 11 and is being led by Laura Zuber, a trained and licensed facilitator in these resources. To register on-line, please go to www.standrewacademy.org

What is the story of his life? Where is his plot headed? The answer is nowhere. Nothing will change. He'll just eventually die, hardly noticed, until his body is put in some sort of pauper's grave.

But in an instant, all is changed. When Bartimaeus rushes to meet Jesus, utterly throwing himself on Jesus' mercy, his life is restored. He finds a new plot. He finds that there is a story for him yet, a story inaugurated by and centered upon his Savior.

Notice what happens at the end of the passage from Mark. Bartimaeus doesn't resume his begging by the side of the road. He doesn't even head home to family. There probably is no home and no family. Bartimaeus has come to Jesus (v. 50), trusted Jesus completely, and will now follow Jesus (v. 52). As Jesus heads onward down the road, Bartimaeus follows him. He knows where the story of his own life will now take him.

The stories of our lives

Many of us would be hard-pressed to tell the story of our lives. We could recount past events and we might be able to make a few predictions about the future, or at least lay out some hopes. But finding the purpose in it all, seeing a meaningful narrative . . . well, that is another matter. Early in our lives, we might think that we have enough control to shape our lives and achieve our dreams. But we soon find that dreams change and control eludes us.

Like Bartimaeus, we can find the story we seek only by coming to Jesus, by taking a seat at his table. Life can be difficult. So often these days, the world seems to be swirling out of control. But in Jesus Christ, we find a faithfulness and a hope that transcends our problems and our fears. By coming to Jesus and following him down the same path as Bartimaeus, we will find a God-given story for our lives. Let's be clear. We won't find that all our wants are met. Bartimaeus would have found his story even if Jesus had not healed him. It was the man, not the cure. Bartimaeus wanted to see, but he found far more.

Kalas quotes Peggy Noonan, who wrote, "Life isn't flat and thin and 'realistic,' it's rich and full of mystery and surprise." In short, true living is full of God, in whom we find rich and full lives, full of story.

Thru the Bible Daily Bible Readings

August 20-26

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help.

Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Sunday 2 Corinthians 10-13; Psalm 115 Paul defends his ministry, shares some visions, and issues a warning.</p>	<p>Monday A day for reflection and catching up</p>
<p>Tuesday Ezra 1-4; Psalm 116 The exiles begin to return from Babylonia; worship is restored in Jerusalem; conflicts ensue around the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple</p>	<p>Wednesday Ezra 5-7; Psalm 117 The temple is completed (though it is a shadow of Solomon's temple and there is no ark); Ezra arrives in Jerusalem</p>
<p>Thursday Ezra 8-10; Psalm 118:1-14 The returning exiles prove to be faithless (9:1-4) and Ezra prays for the people of God</p>	<p>Friday Nehemiah 1-3; Psalm 118:15-29 Nehemiah is sent to Judah to organize the people and lead them in the rebuilding of Jerusalem</p>
<p>Saturday Nehemiah 4-7; Psalm 119:1-16 Nehemiah has to deal with those who oppose allowing the Jews to rebuild their walls</p>	

Sermon Notes

Announcing the new St. Andrew Academy!!
Registration is now on-line at www.standrewacademy.org
Look for the brochure in your mail

We've completely revamped the Bible Academy. It is now the St. Andrew Academy. We've added lots of new classes and teachers: marriage, parenting, spiritual gifts, missions, and more have been added to our classes on the Bible and spiritual formation. An all-new brochure has been designed and is being mailed to thousands of homes in our area. This is outreach! You can see the class schedule now and even register on-line at our new website: www.standrewacademy.org. **Please register early!**

Scott's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. We have more than ten small groups meeting now and a growing number of opportunities to meet other members of the St. Andrew community. If you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott Engle at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@standrewcccl.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

Lest we think that "story-less" lives are led only by the poor and marginalized like Bartimaeus, Kalas offers these observations:

"Because I travel a great deal, I spend many hours in the executive waiting rooms of airports. I travel enough to get this privilege free of charge. In those executive rooms, the people around me are very important. They sometimes tell me so. They have cell phone, computers, attaché cases, and the appurtenances of busyness.

But as I watch them chattering on their cell phones, sending our their email, and hurrying to the next flight, I ask myself if there's a plot in their lives. Are their lives any less flat than [Bartimaeus]? . . . No. . . . Not unless they meet the Savior, the One who . . . comes into our human lives, if we let him, so that our lives will be delivered from the flat and the thin . . ."

Does your own life have a story, a plot? Do you know where you are going and why? Would you say that your life tends toward the "flat and thin" or the "rich and mysterious?" If, like most of us, your life tends toward the "flat and thin," how can Jesus lead you toward a richer, fuller, more surprising, and more purposeful life? Perhaps you have a story you could share about finding in Christ a richer life. In what ways do you think Bartimaeus' life might have changed after heading off down the road behind Jesus? What ought we to change in our own lives if we are truly following after Jesus? How?