

Carol's Reflection – Oct 24

At the Messy Connections Conference last week, Linnea Good said, 'A story, at best, is something that grows the storyteller'.

A story engages us. It might give us something to consider, something to ponder, an idea with which to spend some time. A story might reach out and grab us. A story might stay with us. A story might cascade like a canopy of stars to light our way.

We all have a story. At the Conference Susie McPherson Derendy had us on the edge of our seats, listening to every word as she talked about the indigenous tradition of the story stick. She kept a few special things that she had collected over the years and attached them to her stick as she talked about different times in her life. And, as we received the gift of the story stick, Lucy wondered "if God has a little cache of precious things like this for each of us, reminding God of special moments".

Linnea assured us that 'when you know the story, you can tell the story'.

So, let's tell the Gospel story for today:

They 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.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

Then 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."

Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

What a story! It grabs our attention with its simplicity. It's a story like this that helps us to claim the Gospels as Good News! The blind can see!

The Messy Church team explored this story a number of years ago – when the church was under construction and we were needing to meet in Scout Hall. We had resources

from the CNIB so that we could understand a little bit about blindness. And when the time came to walk a path wearing a blindfold, well, more than one of us had to lift the edge and peek out in order to feel safe.

But the Gospel of Mark wants to give us another story to help us to understand the importance of Jesus as he heads to Jerusalem. Every bit of this story is Good News filled with symbolism.

In Hebrew, the name Bartimaeus literally means 'son of the unclean' – helping the hearers of the story to remember all the associations that Jesus has with the unclean – the lepers, the tax collectors, the sinners, those possessed by demons -- Jesus has embraced them all.

And blind Bartimaeus cries out – while sitting on the sidelines – Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. That's where Mark is using the double meanings of vision and seeing – Bartimaeus may not be able to use his eyes to see, but he is able to truly see – seeing in the sense of understanding. Jesus is 'Son of David', Messiah.

He sees that Jesus is the one sent from God. He sees that all things are possible with Jesus. He sees, what, in Mark's Gospel, the disciples cannot seem to see. He who is blind, has the sight of God.

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Jesus hears Bartimaeus' call, and he stands still. He stands still. He does not go to him, but he calls him. He calls him like he has called the disciples. And, following on the heels of the story of the rich person who cannot follow because he has so many possessions, Bartimaeus throws off his cloak – perhaps the only thing he owns, and springs up and comes to Jesus.

Without being asked, he frees himself of anything holding him back in order to present himself to Jesus.

And, unlike the disciples James and John who have just asked Jesus for the best places in the Kingdom/kingdom of Heaven, he asks to be like others – he asks to see.

"My teacher, let me see again."

Let me see again. He knows what it is to see. He knows what it is to be part of society. He knows what it is to be part of a community, and he knows what it is to be

outcast, unclean, alone.

Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Bartimaeus receives his sight. He is healed. He is free to go back to a life he might have had before when he could see –but it wasn't about going back. It was about going forward. It was about being called. It was about following Jesus to a new way – where the blind are given sight, where the deaf can hear, where the lame can walk, and where the captives are set free.

It is about the blessing of Jesus that might just enable Bartimaeus to be a blessing to others.

I wonder if this story can cascade into a canopy of stars to light our way? I wonder if we can consider how we are called to see with the eyes of faith. I wonder if we can see those who are left out. I wonder if we can be a blessing to others.

In the words of the hymn, Be Thou my vision, O joy of my heart...