

Chapel Talk
October 27, 2024 - Family Weekend Chapel
Elizabeth Ferguson, P'25

Thank you first to Joy McGrath, Rev B, and Rev G for the invitation to speak this morning. Also, a thank you to the faculty and staff who love and care for our students every single day. And to all of the students for showing up for each other day in and day out. Our family is so grateful to be part of this community.

Please join me in prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

I happen to be a born and bred Presbyterian, but for the last few years, I have had the opportunity to spend time with a really cool 5-foot-nuthin' Catholic nun who is about to turn 80 years old. Year after year, Sister Marcy takes a small cohort of people under her wing for a three year program to learn the art and practice of spiritual direction.

What *is* spiritual direction you may ask? The quick answer is that spiritual directors accompany people as they seek to deepen their relationship with God. Sister Marcy uses the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola as the guiding framework for this practice. Ignatius was a 16th century Spanish soldier who later founded the Society of Jesus (aka the Jesuits), and he had this radical notion of “finding God in all things.” He even dared to suggest that when you read scripture or pray with scripture, you could imaginatively place yourself in the scene. So this is my invitation for us today—that we imagine ourselves in today’s story from the gospel of Mark—as we look to find God in all things.

Jesus and his disciples and a crowd of people are leaving Jericho, and from the side of the road Bartimaeus begins to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” And, did you notice what the crowd tried to do?

They ordered him to be quiet—basically they tried to *shush* Bartimaeus. Now, I don’t know what happens in your family, but if you happen to know our daughter Quinn, or anyone else in our family, you can imagine the response. There might be a chin tilt, furrowed eyebrows, and a quizzical look, ... “Did that person ... (did that crowd) ... just try to shush me?” The *response* to being shushed may also be the same in your family as it is in ours and as it was for Bartimaeus when he cries out all the louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

What happens next? Jesus stops.

He stands still and says, “Call him here.” In my imagination, the crowd starts murmuring, and people start waving their hands and calling out to Bartimaeus, “Take heart. Get up! Jesus is calling you!” I’m seeing Tyrus’s mom in this story. I don’t know if you have ever seen Doty on the sidelines of a football game, but she is in the crowd, waving her hands and calling to her baby and all of those football players out there some version of “Get up! Take heart!” Basically, Don’t. Miss. Your. Moment. (Find God in all things.)

Bartimeaus is ready and he is not about to miss his moment; in a flurry of motion, he throws off his cloak, springs up, and comes to Jesus who is standing still, waiting. And the crowd

goes silent. Jesus asks, “What do you want me to do for you?”

My sense is that this question is not just for Bartimeaus but this question is also for the sake of the crowd. I imagine this crowd is full of people who Bartimaeus has never met. But there are also people who have known him since he was child, and they have been faithfully present throughout his life. This is where Ember’s dad, Adam, shows up in the story: he who has never missed one of his kids’ games. Consistently present, week after week, year after year, Adam has seen the good days and the bad days as a steady, quiet witness in the crowd.

So whether the people in the crowd are strangers, or whether they have known Bartimaeus from the time before he became blind—all are bearing witness to this Loving Presence that responds to the request: “Lord, have mercy!”

Sometimes in order to have a fuller understanding of a 2,000-year-old text, I find it helpful to read different interpretations of scripture, or read it in Spanish. Where we read, “have mercy,” la biblia dice, “ten compasión”—have compassion.

Jesus is asking, *What is the compassion you need?* For all we know, Bartimaeus may have a broken heart; he may want to regain his sight; he may want to be understood for who he is beyond what other people see and assume about him.

What is the compassion *you* need? Each of us carries something that feels vulnerable or a piece of us that may be suffering and seeks compassion. We are also connected to various communities that may suffer and seek compassion. In big and small ways we are all seeking a Loving Presence that will bear witness to who we are in that moment and participate in our healing.

That Loving Presence doesn’t just exist on the page of some holy book, but in the people here. In this place I have witnessed and heard stories about the compassion and loving presence that has been shared here at St. Andrew’s.

It’s the advisor who says, it seems like you’ve had a hard week, can I take you to ice cream?

It’s Al, the athletic trainer, who tirelessly wraps yet another injured body part of one of our kids.

It’s the student who drops off a note or flowers at your door.

It’s the parents/families who host students over breaks and give them a home away from home.

It’s Mr. Stan in the dining hall who gives you a warm smile.

It’s the colleague who invites you for a walk.

Their loving presence is felt and a seed of healing is planted.

So we return back to Bartimaeus facing Jesus with the crowd all around him and Bartimaeus speaks the desire of his heart. He isn't afraid to share his vulnerability with Jesus, "My teacher, let me see *again*." And with compassion, Jesus replies, "Go, your *faith* has made you well." And what is faith? Scripture tells us that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.

Bartimeaus has faith that this Loving Presence that he couldn't see, had the power to heal him. And he is made well. And I imagine that the crowd that could see, that was able to bear witness to the tender mercy of God, was made well too.

So dear crowd, keep showing up with compassion—whether you are enthusiastically waving your arms or quietly standing still—because your loving presence has and will continue to bring tender mercy and healing to the people in our midst.

May it be so and may we see God in all things. Amen.