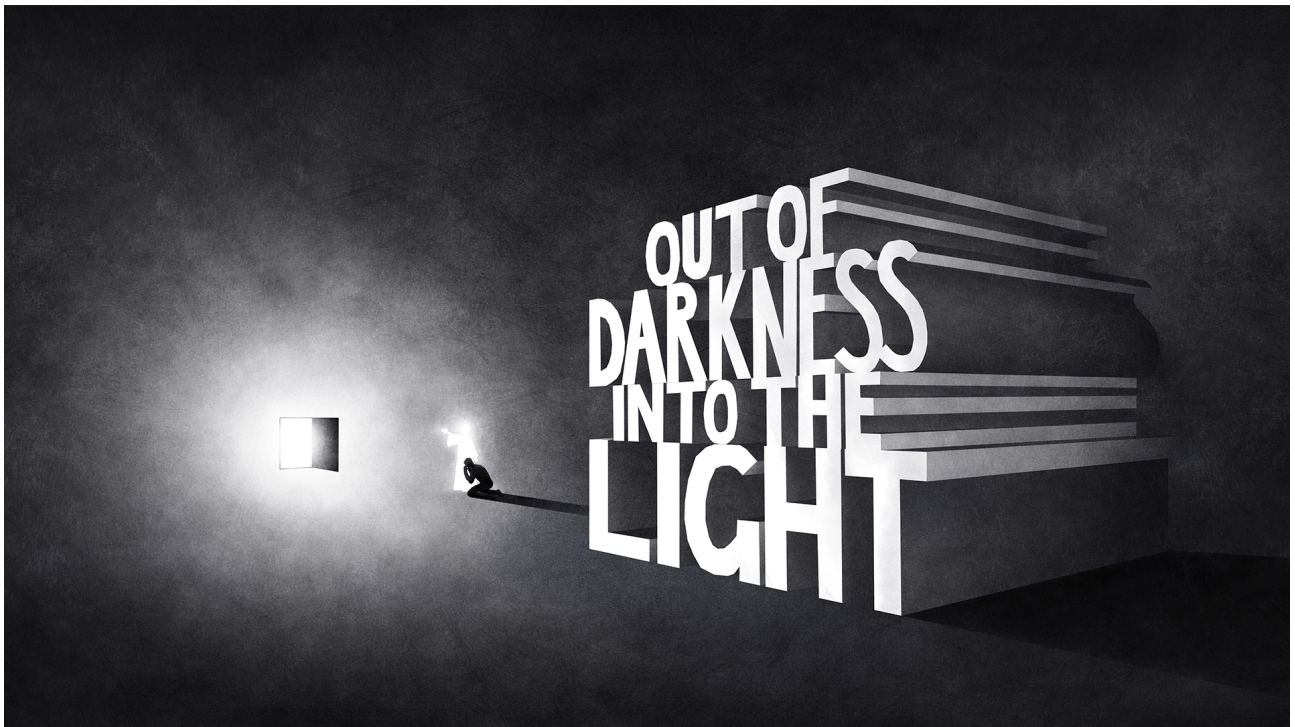


# OUT OF THE DARKNESS INTO THE LIGHT

*Longing to see again*

October 2021 (3-30th October)



During the month of October we would like to use the story of Bartimaeus (Mark 10: 46-52) as an analogy to tap into the general feeling we have that there is a longing in many people's hearts to regain their spiritual sight. The readings in the lectionary this month are centred around some key passages from Job with additional daily texts supplementing them. We have divided the story of Bartimaeus into different sections that will help us place ourselves in the story and then we will use the lectionary texts to help us reflect upon how we can praise and serve God in the midst of suffering and spiritual blindness.

Please read the following blog piece which will be published in the *Life and Work* October edition. This will give you a feel for the tone of the reflections during the month.

## **Take Heart He's Calling You**

*Albert Bogle*

When I read the Gospels I'm aware that the narratives that highlight the healing of a blind person often have a dual meaning. The more you read the more you realise Jesus comes to give spiritual sight to women and men. It is this spiritual sight that is the more important because it changes a person's perspective in life. Jesus often talked about having eyes and seeing, or not seeing things as they are, or will be.

I think it is interesting to look at the story of the healing of Bartimaeus and see how it might be used as a parable for us in the church today. Many of us have been spiritually

blind for a long time. But since lockdown we long to have our spiritual sight restored. We long to see things as God sees them and that we might have the faith to believe we can see the church we love, renewed in our time.

Bartimaeus wasn't always blind. Something had happened in his life that had robbed him of his sight. But something now was stirring within him as he makes his prayer to Jesus to have mercy on him.

If we agree the church is not simply made up of the gathered congregation on a Sunday but includes those who are unable to attend because of so many different reasons – including their mistakes or the mistakes of others – we begin to realise that our ministry goes far beyond the circle of committed people attending on a Sunday. There is a vast diaspora of people like Bartimaeus looking to have their spiritual sight restored.

As congregations begin to make preparations to return to Sunday worship we need to be aware that something has changed. Many are longing for something more. It's as though an awareness of our spiritual blindness has brought about a longing for a new set of eyes to see the way forward. In order to understand the new spiritual direction that has to take place in the life of many of our congregations.

During lockdown the internet has uncovered the prayers of many seeking healing and renewal. The thing we all need to take hold of in the story of Bartimaeus is Jesus answers his prayer.

I love the way the story is related in Mark's Gospel. The word that Jesus is willing to respond to his prayer comes from the crowd. The word to Bartimaeus is, "Take heart he is calling you". Notice Bartimaeus pays attention to the call. He gets up and leaves his cloak and comes to a face to face meeting with Jesus. For that day on he had a new perspective on life.

So who is it in the crowd that is telling you "He's is calling you,"? I bet it's the most unexpected of people. That is often when you know it's time to listen.

*Each week of the four week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.*

# Living with faith in times of great trouble (3 October)

Reflect on our limited knowledge of God and the integrity of faith that will not let us go even when every bone in our body tells us to lose heart.

## 1. Job 1: 1, 2: 2-10

## 2. Psalm 26

## 3. Genesis 2: 18-24

## 4. Psalm 8

## 5. Hebrews 1: 1-4, 2: 5-12

## 6. Galatians 6: 2

## 7. Philippians 2: 7-9

1. **The integrity of faith.** Job's philosophy is simply you must take the bad with the good. He persists in the integrity of faith.
2. **God knows how he made us.** The psalmist looks to God to vindicate his life. His persistence in faith will redeem him — all out of God's gracious compassion.
3. **Integrity of companionship in suffering.** It easier to live with faith and suffering when you're not alone. Note the place of the animals and then the soulmate?
4. **You have a glory of your own.** This psalm speaks of our responsibility to others — even in suffering we can see the glory with which human beings are crowned .
5. **We have a family member at the heart of God.** Jesus is our brother who also endured pain. He understands our struggles.
6. **Sharing our troubles and sufferings.** This epistle is encouraging us to bear each others' burdens to help each of us fulfil the law. It is the bearing of burdens that helps us live with faith in times of great trouble.
7. **That we might be...** This passage in many ways sums up the whole biblical teaching for the rest of the month. Jesus emptied himself of his glory that we might be glorified through him.

# Finding the faith to cry out a prayer “Have mercy on me!” (10 October)

Reflect on Bartimaeus's prayer “Have mercy on me.” (Mark 10: 47) This is surely the universal cry of all who are going through times of great trials and suffering. Job, like Bartimaeus, looks to God for mercy, he wants to see again. Taking the story of healing as an analogy to help us understand the journey the church must take to the place of renewal. Could you think of seven things for which we cry for mercy? What are the things we need to begin to see more clearly?

1. Job 23: 1-9,  
16-17

2. Psalm 22: 1-15

3. Amos 5: 6-7,  
10-15

4. Psalm 90:  
12-17

5. Hebrews 4:  
12-16

6. Mark 10: 46-48  
(46-50)

7. Psalm 51:  
10-19

1. **The honesty of Job.** God can be hidden from our eyes — the cry of honest doubt and longing.
2. **The agony of the psalmist.** The psalmist feels abandoned by God — the cry of abandonment.
3. **God hates injustice.** A cry for justice in the world
4. **Longing for wisdom and knowledge of God.** A cry of longing to know.
5. **In search of integrity.** God's word is living, dynamic as a sword judging the intentions of the heart. A cry for a pure heart and a right spirit within us.
6. **Have mercy on me!** The universal cry.
7. **Repentance is a response.** A cry for a clean heart and the right spirit.

# Believing the voice that says - "Take heart he is calling you." (17 October)

Reflect on the crowd's response "Take heart he is calling you." (see Mark 10: 49) Could this message be not only for Bartimaeus? Could it be an encouraging phrase for the many who are longing for their spiritual sight to be restored? Could it be that once again we are being invited to answer the call even amidst our suffering and doubt? What is it that you need clarity on? Is it a call to the ministry, is it a call to the eldership? Is it a call to take up a new challenge? To step out in faith? When we do we are never alone.

## 1. Job 38: 1-7

1. **God questions Job.** Job comes to realise the greatness of God. We need to put our lives in perspective even our suffering, and more so our calling, to grasp the significance of God's call on our lives and the privilege we have been given "to be called".

## 2. Psalm 104: 1-9, 24-33

2. **Do you know your worth?** This psalm gives a template of how we should respond to God. We need to give God the respect he is due. We need to realise we are wonderfully made. When God calls we should take heart. His calling lifts us above our suffering and fear.

## 3. Isaiah 53: 1-12

3. **Do you realise how much you are loved?** The writer of Isaiah begins chapter 53 by asking a question about believing. God's actions cause us all to stand back aghast. He has given us his heart that we might take heart and see with new eyes the blessings and the forgiveness that has been bestowed upon us.

## 4. Mark 10: 35-45

4. **The call of God always leads to the place of service.** It's interesting to note that the story of Bartimaeus follows on after this story of disciples jostling for power...

## 5. Hebrews 5: 1-10

5. **Look out for the self-appointed.** The calling is never one of self-appointment. See verse 4 — even Jesus understood his calling was from God. So each of us must take seriously God's call upon our lives.

## 6. Mark 10: 49 (46-52)

6. **Take heart!** An encouraging phrase for the many who are longing for their spiritual sight to be restored.

## 7. Romans 8: 28-39

7. **To be called is so much more than a voice overheard.** Here is a wonderful summary of the place we have attained in God's Kingdom.

# Leaving the baggage of the past behind — for the healing encounter (24 October)

Reflect on leaving the past to reach out to the future, believing God will renew his church. I love the way the story of Bartimaeus is related in Mark's Gospel. Bartimaeus pays attention to the call. He gets up and leaves his cloak and comes to a face to face meeting with Jesus (see Mark 10: 50). There is always a leaving if we are going to have meeting with God. Just as the book of Job describes his encounter with God, he leaves the questions of his friends behind as he is struck dumb in the presence of the Almighty.

## 1. Job 42: 1-6, 10-17

1. **Job is vindicated.** Job realises God is God, he can do all things. He will fulfil his purposes no-one will thwart them.

## 2. Genesis 12: 1-5

2. **Leaving the past behind in old age.** Abram, like Bartimaeus, left his comfort zone, his cloak, and he obeyed God's call. Never too old to be obedient. God's call to the elderly is as valid as his call to the young

## 3. Matthew 14: 22-33

3. **Peter steps out but loses focus.** Stepping out we will fail but the failing can be a learning point in our life. What have we as a church learned?

## 4. Psalm 126

4. **When the encounter is real.** We must never doubt that God will renew and strengthen his people.

## 5. Mark 10: 50-52 (46-52)

5. **Rabbi I want to see.** Longing, as God's people must be, to regain our spiritual sight.

## 6. Luke 14: 25-35

6. **The cost of leaving and cleaving.** Making journeys of faith are never easy. There is always a cost to pay, but God is no person's debtor.

## 7. Revelation 2: 1-7

7. **Return to your first love.** The call to our first love is a call to trust and commitment and faith.