

October 25, 2009
Lectionary 30b
Mark 10:46-52
Pr. Craig M. Mueller

I CAN'T HELP BUT NOTICE YOUR CLOAK

I've been thinking about you this week, Bartimaeus. Is it all right that I call you Bart? It works a little better for contemporary listeners! Anyway, I find it intriguing that you are one of the few folks who come to Jesus for healing who is given a name in the gospels. You left everything to follow Jesus. We'd have to say you were one of his disciples even if you're not one of the official, authorized twelve. But to my knowledge there is no St. Bartimaeus Church. No Bartimaeus icons.

But I suspect I know the problem. You were a blind beggar. And more than that, you made a huge, gigantic scene. You were out of control. You shouted at Jesus, demanding that he heal you. If you tried to do that today at church, at a political rally, at a public event, the security guards would drag you out of the room. We would think that in addition to being blind, you were probably a bit mentally ill. But the words you yell out—*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me*—are the basis for the Kyrie we sing in our liturgy. *Lord, have mercy*. We usually chant the words rather quietly. Maybe at times we should sing the words strongly as if our lives depended on them: *Lord, have mercy!*

But there are other things about you, Bart, that intrigue me. I can't help but notice your cloak. It seems to be your only possession. We don't use that word very often these days, unless we're talking about a "cloak room" to hang coats. I guess we all wear cloaks—outer garments of some kind—even if we don't call them cloaks. But your cloak seems to be the only possession you have. When you lay it on the ground it collects coins that passer-bys throw to you when you're begging. Your cloak is a one-piece bed, coat, and security blanket!

I hear that the fights at homeless shelters are usually about people's stuff. Often folks even take their possessions with them when they go to the bathroom, lest they get stolen. I imagine you always have your cloak with you, Bart.

And what a contrast you are to the rich man in the gospel a few weeks ago. He hung on tightly to his possessions and went away sad when Jesus asked him to give away his stuff for the sake of the poor. But you, Bartimaeus, as soon as Jesus calls out for you, you spring up! You throw down your cloak. You beg Jesus to give you back your sight. And your faith makes you well. Seeing with new eyes, you follow Jesus on the way.

I thought about you on Wednesday as I walked by the lake and saw some of the most beautiful red and orange leaves I've ever seen in Chicago. After being in Vermont three weeks ago it was so awesome to get autumn "peak" colors a second time. The trees are "cloaked" in unsurpassed beauty. But leaves can't hang on. They must let go, and die. They must lay down their cloaks, if you will.

And it made me think of our baptismal robes. The white cloaks that give us our identity as followers of Christ. The white albs worn by the choir and other leaders are signs of the robes that cloak us all. When we gather together there are no distinctions. Doesn't matter how much money you have. How much self-esteem. How much faith. It's mercy that cloaks us, clothes us, covers us.

And then there's the colored cloak—the chasuble—worn by the presiding minister, on behalf of the community. Flowing and full, like a cape. Like divine abundance spread over the world. Healing our brokenness and giving us new eyes to see.

And Bart, I was thinking about your healing when I remembered that Lutherans and some other Protestants are celebrating Reformation Sunday today. Just days ago we heard that Roman Catholics are making a new provision for Anglicans upset over the ordination of gay and women bishops to come on over to Rome. There are a lot of ELCA Lutherans struggling over their affiliation after the votes this summer in Minneapolis. Sadly, the heritage of the Reformation is to form a new denomination every time we disagree with another viewpoint. There is such need for healing in the church. But even greater needs for a world wracked with violence and poverty. And yet we wrangle over who has the truth.

What would it mean for us to see again? To receive spiritual vision and insight?

I wonder about that, Bart, as Holy Trinity conducts its annual generosity appeal with the theme *live simply*. In just a moment a member of the generosity team, Jon Skogen, will share some reflections by Holy Trinity members. It makes me wonder about how we are clothed in Christ. How we as a community practice our faith, little by little, until we are cloaked in simple wonder, in gratitude and in generosity.