

October 16, 2016 “On The Jericho Road” Luke 18:35-42

Our NIV translation says these things happened as Jesus was approaching Jericho. And there is nothing wrong about that translation. But hear how the KJV translated the Greek back in the early 1600s: “And it came to pass, that as Jesus was come near to Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging.” When you link that phrasing with the portion that precedes this one, which begins with the words, “Jesus took the twelve (disciples) aside and told them, “We are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written by the prophets will be fulfilled.” It becomes apparent that Jesus and his followers are travelling. They are travelling, on foot from Galilee where the balance of Jesus 3 years of teaching and ministering took place, to the hotbed of opposition to HIS ministry, Jerusalem.

They are travelling south. I never understood that before our trip to Israel. I learned the orientation by being on the ground as it were, by travelling, in our case, by bus. And as Jesus did, so it was for us, as we made the trip from Galilee to Jerusalem, we approached Jericho. We were on the Jericho road. And you know things about the Jericho road. It was not a very safe place to be unless you were journeying with a group of people...a group of sufficient size that would lend security to one and all if bandits were in the area. Jesus was not just travelling with the twelve disciples. The band of followers with HIM was probably close to the number of one hundred and twenty.

And the journey then as the journey today takes you near enough to Jericho that you can spend time on the Jericho road. Jesus told a story about that road, or rather about a man who was foolish enough to make the journey on that road alone. I quote a younger

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Clint Eastwood from the western Pale Rider. “Man alone is easy prey.” On this Jericho road, the man of whom Jesus spoke was set upon by robbers. They beat him within an inch of his life, stripped him and left him for dead on that road. It was a common occurrence. And you will remember the man was Jewish. And at least 2 clergy men travelling the road came upon the wounded man and realizing just how dangerous it was, they did not pause to help the wounded one. They fled for safety.

It was a Samaritan...we would say...a Palestinian who came along and saw the body lying in the road and took pity on the man. He spent time tending to the victim's wounds. He put the victim on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he paid to have the man cared for and fed, making the promise that if it cost the innkeeper more than he paid...he would be back and he would settle the account. The Samaritan's acts of mercy have created an idiom in our English language...the good Samaritan is a person who at risk to himself tends to the needs of one who is in distress on the highways and byways of life.

Why all this detail about a story Jesus taught? Because it was on that very road, the Jericho road, that place with a reputation for being dangerous turf, a dangerous place to be travelling alone, that this miracle of healing took place. I had never noticed that before. I have read it many times. I never realized it is that same highway. Not many towns about. Lots of places that are good sites for an ambush. The road twists along and there are big round hills and lots of valleys. I do not think we saw another car when our bus journeyed toward Jericho, and we paused to sing the song that commemorates the story Jesus told.

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That is where Jesus was with the twelve and his crowd of devoted followers that day. He has left Galilee behind. HE will never go back there. HE is heading for Jerusalem where HE will be seized and arrested and crucified, and where HE will rise from death the 3rd day...on a Sunday morning. And as Jesus and the twelve and the crowd make their way toward Jericho, probably a few miles from their destination, there is this man sitting by the roadside begging for money, when travellers come along. It is a dangerous place for the blind man to be. The only thing that makes the blind man a less likely victim than those who travel this way is that it is obvious that he is blind. It is obvious he is very poor. It is obvious to those who want to make a score, this blind man is not worth the trouble. He is dressed in rags. He does not have clothing worth taking. If he has any money...it is only a few coins. He is not getting wealthy here by the side of the Jericho road. He is trying to survive. Apparently even bandits take pity on him. He is worthless.

Luke's text is very specific about this next detail. "When he

heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening.” You see, I did not make that part up about there being a crowd. And they were not travelling in hushed tones, with whispering conversations. There were enough of them that they made noise. Their conversations were boisterous. You could hear them coming from a distance. They felt so secure in their numbers that they made lots of noise. And it was the noises the blind man heard. It is their noise that causes him to ask the first person who listens to his questions, “What is going on?” He can't see but he can hear...there is a crowd on the road...why, who, what has stirred them up so?”

And he gets an answer from someone who has given him a moment's attention. “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” The blind

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man knows that name. He has heard stories that trickled out of Galilee. There is a reason that the religious establishment in Jerusalem is concerned about Jesus and HIS followers. There are stories being told about Jesus teaching, and the miracles of healing, everywhere. They are shared like infection. And this blind man gets really excited.

Notice this. The blind man does not say to whomever it was that told him Jesus is passing by, “Would you ask Jesus if I might have a word?” He is not quiet. He is shouting at the top of his lungs. He wants to be heard over all the conversations that are part of this crowd's noisiness. He wants to be heard over the tramp of their feet, their laughter and jostling. He wants to be heard by Jesus, whose reputation has preceded HIM on the Jericho road.

“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” I am not exaggerating. This blind man is setting up a cry like to waken the dead. He is interrupting the conversations in the crowd, and among its members. The advance party that reached the blind man first and probably answered his questions, is less than sympathetic, they plead for quiet and they rebuke him for making such a fuss. But in fear that he might actually go unnoticed...he shouts all the louder... “Son of David, have mercy on me!” It is plain that this blind man knows two things about Jesus, whatever the details are that he has heard about him. He knows Jesus is a Jew...Son of David. He knows that Jesus can dispense...real mercy. Mercy that changes lives. Mercy that could be light to his darkness.

This is a significant detail. The crowd did not stop because the blind man deserved attention. Nor because of his caterwalling at the side of the road. The crowd stopped because

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Jesus stopped. Luke tells us that Jesus stopped and ordered that the man be brought to HIM. If there is one thing this crowd understands, it is this. Something significant is going to happen. Do they know that a miracle is about to occur. No they do not. But they know that Jesus can do miracles. If Jesus wants the man brought to HIM, He is either going to say something really important, or do something that could be marvellous. They know Jesus. They know the power of God is in HIM. They know that mercy flows out of HIM like healing strength. They are on this Jericho road because they want to hear what Jesus will say and see what Jesus will do. Jesus is where it, whatever it may be, is happening! And as a result of that...there is a sudden quiet.

Luke is telling us everyone in that crowd heard Jesus when he asked HIS question. "What do you want me to do for you?" And Luke is telling us they all heard the man's reply. "Lord, I want to see." In this dangerous place, the blind man has defined what mercy means to him. I want to see. Jesus said to that man... "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." It is all about recognizing that Jesus is the mercy of God in dangerous places in real life. The crowd got to hear what they wanted to hear. And then they got to see what they wanted to see.

Immediately...Jesus said the words...the man sees. And notice this. He does not run home to tell his friends and family. He follows Jesus. Joins the crowd. He praises God. He recognizes from whom all blessings flow. He follows Jesus, joins the crowd, praises God, and as infectious as faith is, the crowd that has followed Jesus for the better part of two plus years, almost three, they praise God too. They have seen the mercy of God. In Jesus Christ, they have seen the mercy of God.

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This is also important. What happened next? It is as basic as this....the journey continued. Praising God and jubilant at seeing heavenly mercy poured out on this blind man...they enter the city of Jericho. Jericho has a history. Miracles have happened here in the past. This is the place where walls dissolved. Where Joshua fought and won. Where Rahab found new life and a new people. All of these details are part of the whole

picture...on the Jericho road.

Let us pray

Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth. For mercy poured out we thank you. For miracles of healing grace we praise your name. Grant that our faith in You, Lord Jesus, Son of David, might be sufficient for the times and places in which we find ourselves. And may it be that we give you the honour, the glory and the praise, for we too, journey on the Jericho road. Amen