

October 30, 2016 “On The Jericho Road: The Conclusion” Matthew 20:29-34

Anniversaries in the Church of Jesus Christ, regardless of denominations, are significant occasions. Their significance is primarily this: the anniversary proclaims to the world, and encourages the faithful that for “this long” in this place, these people who gather here, have been worshipping God, celebrating the fact that Jesus saves, and have offered a ministry of mercy and grace to the surrounding community, and the people of the area. St. Andrew's has not only been around for 162 years, the people who are St. Andrew's and have been St. Andrew's have been worshipping Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and serving and caring in this locale for that length of time.

It does not mean that we can or should think of ourselves as in some way superior to the people around us. That would be wrong headed and heaping the sin of pride on top of our other sins, for which we seek forgiveness at the hand of the redeeming God of the Bible. It does mean that for a 162 years a group of people who believe, are characterized by faith, and for some it is a lot of faith and for some it is a little faith, there has been an ongoing desire to serve the living God, and in His name to serve others. To share the faith we hold so dear with others. To bid, any who are willing to come along with us, and serve Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, in whatsoever way, we can.

No one that you and I know, has lived for a hundred and sixty two years. Edna Shaw, a lady who was part of this band of believers for a significant span of time, died just about a week ago...she was in her 102nd year. What that means as we consider ourselves as the church, that is an assembly of believers, a crowd of

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believers, is that it is clear, the faces have changed with the passage of time. People who were part of this worshipping caring crowd have passed away. Or moved away. Or for one reason and another dropped out. And others have take up the work, and chosen to commit to sharing the pulling and lifting the harness of faith in Jesus requires. The people have changed. The faces have changed over 162 years. The work has remained the same. To worship and serve Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. And we have

never forgotten that has meant we had to care for,... had to care for, people who were not part of the circle, who had needs we could meet.

And you might well ask the question what does all of this have to do with Matthew chapter 20:29-34, or perhaps a better focus of the question is, why Matthew 20:29-34 on Anniversary Sunday? Well, to begin with I have to confess, the journey of faith for me, has always been a journey of discovery. I did not know, or I had not recognized a tiny little phrase in verse 29 a week ago, or two weeks ago, or even three weeks ago. For those who are with us this morning because it is anniversary Sunday, I have been preaching a series of messages entitled On The Jericho Road. In fifty years of ministry I had not noticed how many references there are in the Gospels to that singular highway!

As a matter of fact if you had asked me how many times the Jericho Road is mentioned in the Gospels in total, I would have replied with absolute certainty, that Jesus mentioned the Jericho Road in His parable of the Good Samaritan. End of story. Final answer. Three weeks ago by the grace of God's Holy Spirit I noticed something that I had not noticed before...that it was on the Jericho Road that Jesus healed a blind man, who was begging for food money. And when the blind man was healed he began praising God

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in an unPresbyterian fashion, I mean he would not be silenced! And he joined the crowd that was following Jesus.

With my eyes opened to the detail of the Jericho Road, I noticed that same week that Jesus entered Jericho by way of the Jericho Road, which became the equivalent of Main Street Jericho, and in the midst of crowds that turned out when they heard Jesus of Nazareth was passing by...the direct result of close to 3 years of ministry replete with stories of miracles, in Galilee, full of stories of marvelous teaching that gave people hope and joy in the midst of the hard slogging of every day life in an occupied land...in the midst of all that, Jesus encountered Zachaeus, a wealthy tax collector. And Zachaeus found what we would call, what Jesus would call, new life. Zachaeus gave much of his wealth away in a matter of hours. Jesus said, Zachaeus was saved...and certainly Zachaeus became a different man, honest, caring, and a man of faith. That also happened on the Jericho Road, now a city street running through the heart of the city.

This week I stumbled on today's reading. "As Jesus was leaving Jericho...Main Street is about to become the highway once again, where the speed limit for cars today, could be expected to increase to 80 or 90 km per hour." And at this end of the city of Jericho, on this same continuous route, being followed by a minimum of a hundred to a hundred and twenty...the crowd may have grown beyond that number given what has happened, people want to see what Jesus will do, to hear what Jesus will say. Being with Jesus, is where it is happening and people are attracted to Him and want to be there when "it" occurs. This time "it" is two more blind men, and as history repeats itself, they cry out for help, having heard of what Jesus can do.

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"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us." These are not general terms. They are very specific. Lord. They are calling Jesus by the title the Jews of that time and place used to refer to the God of Moses, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. They call Him, Son of David, the title by which the Jews lived in expectation of the coming of the Messiah, the one who can save us from the calamities of life that affect and infect our times.

"Have mercy on us!" When Jesus of Nazareth (which is in Galilee) is passing by on the Jericho Road, they are begging Him to hear their cry. They usually begged for money. But here they are begging for mercy. To be saved from their affliction? Yes certainly. But also to be saved from the fragile nature of their lives. To be saved from death due to poverty, induced by blindness. To be saved from what they are and have become. To be saved from the affect sin has had on their lives. Remember I defined sin in the first message as the chaos factor in life, the thing that causes us to say one thing and do another. The thing that causes us to act as disciples of Jesus one moment, and to act as disciples of this fallen and Faithless world, the next. Sin is the cause of inconsistency in our lives, and the lives of our neighbours.

I mean, you have heard this story before! Jesus asked them, "What do you want Me to do?" They responded that they wanted to see. And the Scripture says, "He had compassion on them. And HE touched their eyes. And they immediately received their sight. And they joined the crowd. They followed Jesus. They followed Him that day, and in

Jerusalem, they probably saw Him crucified. And in the upper room, they probably saw Him on the Sunday evening, risen from the dead. He is their Saviour even as He is ours.

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Yes, but what is the point of all of this on an anniversary Sunday 162 years into the life of witness which is our church's, our assembly, our crowd's reason for existence? The Jericho Road is a dangerous place to live and a dangerous place to travel by yourself. Dear friends whether we realize it or not, we too are travelling on the Jericho Road. Make a mistake, forget for even a few minutes, where you are, and catastrophe can result. Stumble and fall, and it could be the end. Life could be tragically altered and even end. The world is a dangerous place. Some people call it the jungle. Some people call it hell. And we are in it, on it and we are affected by it every hour and day.

And the good news is Jesus has been on the Jericho Road. The part where it twists and turns and climbs through the wilderness, the part where it runs through the city of Jericho, the part where it goes back into the wilderness environment...all the way to Jerusalem, to Calvary, to the open tomb. And if we cry out to HIM recognizing who He is...Lord, Messiah, The MERCIFUL ONE, HE is compassionate...HE hears our cries and HE changes our lives and our lot. He saves us. He saves us in every way a person can be saved. And on an anniversary Sunday in our church's sanctuary it is important and can be a blessing to remember these facts.

One more thing. When we started that journey down the Jericho Road, a crowd was following Jesus. They witnessed a miracle of grace in the healing of a blind man. In Jericho, still on the road, they witnessed a miracle of God's grace as the hated tax man Zachaeus found new life, characterized by generosity, joy, honesty, and faith in Jesus. The crowd that followed HIM out of Jericho...in Willie Nelson's phrase, on the road again, they got to see two miracles of God's grace as the blind men get to see, and together

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they all praise God.

That is one of the things that happens on the Jericho Road. Believers get to see miracles. The power of God strong to save. Let your eyes be open to what God is doing in your life and in the lives of

others...and rejoice. Some say the church is dying, passing away. Some say it is splintering. I say come and see what the Lord is doing inside these walls and out in the byways and the highways. See and rejoice. See and give God the glory.

Let us pray;

Lord we thank you for the privilege of participating in worship on the day that rightly bares your NAME. We thank you for the churches through whom and in the midst of whom we first heard your word proclaimed and claimed faith in Jesus. We thank you for the way the Church has affected the world and changed the world. But most of all we thank you for the Church's continually pointing us to Jesus, the way, the truth and the life. For people who went before us, we praise your name. For the privilege of being called Christian we thank you. Make use of us in the time that remains and when it is time see us home in heaven's crowd. Amen