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Pentecost 22

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Hearing the Voice of Your Saviour”
Text: Mark 10:46-52

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When you look at something, you don't only see what you're looking at, you see what's around it as well, in your peripheral vision. So when I look at you, I don't just see you, I also see chairs and windows, fans hanging from the ceiling, the people sitting around you, and maybe also something flying by. This is good. We need our peripheral vision, especially when you're doing something like driving, to see things coming your way, dangers. But it can also be distracting. Things, maybe many things, drawing your attention away from the one thing you want to look at.

So it is, I read recently, with a man who once could see but lost his sight, who claimed that he could see now *more clearly* - without peripheral visual distractions - than when he still had his physical sight. Like bats and other animals who rely on hearing over seeing, his mind became trained to see with his ears; to visualize what he heard. And without distractions, to focus on the person or thing before him.

So it was, as we heard today, by the side of the road outside Jericho. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus **saw with his ears**. He heard the great crowd passing by. Many people. If you looked at the scene, surely would have seen all sorts of people and all sorts of things. Your eyes would have been drawn to this and that, people old and young, rich and poor, maybe some walking and some being carried. Like walking through DC when a crowd is gathered to protest, or through a crowded shopping district at Christmas. There are all kinds of things are going on. It's hard to spot one person in that crowd.

But Bartimaeus could, because he *heard*. He heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth. Mark doesn't say that someone *told* him it was Jesus of Nazareth - but simply that **he heard it was him**. Or in other words, the one who could see with his ears heard the voice of the one he knew to be Jesus of Nazareth. He didn't need anyone to tell him. He could “see” Him with his ears.

And so Bartimaeus cries out: ***Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!*** Not *Jesus of Nazareth*, Jesus' historical name. But *Jesus, Son of David*, Jesus' Messianic name. The name of the one who not only *could* help him, but who the prophets like Jeremiah prophesied, *would*. Bartimaeus saw Him coming with his ears and cried out to His ears to

mercy him.

Those who could only see with their eyes rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he had heard the prophecies, he had heard the promises, and now he had heard the voice of the one they were talking about. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd, and so **he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”** And the Good Shepherd, who knows His sheep, stops for him, calls to him, speaks to him, and heals him - *with His Word. “Go your way; your faith has made you well.”* Not just any faith, but faith in Jesus, the Son of David. Faith that hears and sees with the ears. Faith that believes and clings to the Word of God.

Which is something we very much need in our world and life today.

For as you look around, what do you see? Both in your main line of vision and in your peripheral vision? There is undoubtedly a great many things. Some good, some not good at all. Things that give us joy, but dangers lurking as well. And maybe not just lurking, but right in front of you, threatening you or attacking you. Political upheaval, the troubles in our schools, nations around the world with more and more powerful weapons, uncontrollable viruses, havoc in your personal life, people seeking to take advantage of you and scam you, crime and selfishness rising, unemployment, disruptions of our supply lines and empty shelves in our stores, the continuing sexual revolution, rainbow flags, protest signs, and what else? What would you add to that list? All these things grabbing your attention, maybe even making it harder for you to see Jesus. *For where is He?* Where is He in all this? He is crowded out in a world so crowded with sin and evil.

But He speaks. He’s not the only one. Just like the crowd leaving Jericho that day, surely there were many speaking and much noise. But Bartimaeus’ ears were attuned to the voice of his Shepherd. He knew that voice. That voice that cut through all the noise. Like a mother who can hear the cry of her baby even if there are a hundred babies crying! He knew. He could *see* Him. He knew He was there because His voice was there.

So it is for you today. Our eyes, our sight, see a great many things, things often confusing and frightening and contradictory. And you can’t see Jesus. But in the midst of it all, our Good Shepherd, who came to us in the midst of this world of sin and evil, **is speaking**. To you. To comfort you. To reassure you. To forgive you. To strengthen you. That you know that He is with you still. That you hear that it is Him and cry out, with blind Bartimaeus, **Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!** And He will, and does, for it is the very thing He has come to do and wants to do. Have mercy on you.

A voice that cuts through all the noise of this world, all the confusion and chaos, all the deception and falsehood, all the lies and blame and boasts, all the threats and demands . . . a voice to cut through all that . . . sounds good, doesn’t it? That we know the truth. That we know that Jesus is with us. That we can live in confidence and peace.

The Scriptures are that voice for us today. And the liturgy is the Scriptures spoken and embodied for us today. That our ears be *attuned*, tuned in, to the voice of our Shepherd, and know it. And also therefore know those voices that aren't. Those voices that claim to be speaking the Word of God, but aren't. Those other voices in the crowd. Through all the noise, Bartimaeus heard the voice of Jesus. Jesus would have the same for you.

That in a world where people don't know who they are anymore, don't know their **identity** and so think they have to make one or choose one for themselves, we hear who we are: **baptized children of God**. An identity that trumps all others because it is who you are here and now, and who you will be forever.

That in a world where people don't know right and wrong anymore, where what is right and what is wrong are constantly changing, creating a world very uncertain and unstable, and creating people plagued with guilt and shame because of who they are and what they have done, we hear words that cut through all that noise: **I forgive you**. Those words do what rewriting history and restitution and trying to make things right ourselves could never do: calm the guilt and shame and fears of our past and give us **hope** for the future.

That in a world where death, or the threat of death, is always present, be it from the weapons and threats of our enemies, random acts of crime and violence, mutating viruses, or the old age that neither diet nor exercise nor medical technology nor surgery can hold off forever, we hear the words of the one who has **overcome death and promises life**. The one who feed us with the Body and Blood that actually did that! The Body and Blood of the one who died and rose and cannot die again. So that we who die will also rise to a life that will not end. To give us courage and confidence to face whatever comes our way.

Bartimaeus was sitting by the side of the road in just such a world. They weren't any better than us, and we aren't any better than them. Just different. But then and now, we need the same things: **identity, hope, and life**. The world will tell you all that *comes from you* - which is quite a burden. And ultimately, an impossible one, and so often driving people to think all kinds of crazy things, believe all kinds of crazy things, do all kinds of crazy things, and in the end, despair. But Jesus speaks a different word, a better word, and says: *it's all from Him*. Gift. He who created you, redeemed you, and sanctifies you. He who went to the cross for you in your place and died your death, so that rising from the dead, you would too, rise with Him, and live His life. **Life as a forgiven child of God**.

Jesus would have you hear that word as well, wherever you happen to be sitting, standing, living, breathing, working, learning, or dying. That you hear Him in the Scriptures at home. That you hear Him in the Scriptures here. That your ears be attuned, tuned in, to hear Him. To hear Him and know the voice of your Shepherd, the voice of

truth, the voice that spoke all things *for you*. That what you need, you have. Like Bartimaeus. That you know who you are. That you have hope. And that you have life.

And then, what do you do with that life? Once-blind-but-now-seeing-Bartimaeus can be a guide here for us, too. For after Jesus said to him, ***Go your way; your faith has made you well***, we heard that ***immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way***. Jesus said: Go your way. Bartimaeus followed Him on His way. He didn't disobey. It's that now Jesus' way was now His way.

And now your way. When the resurrection and life of Jesus are yours, His gift to you, the old way just doesn't cut it anymore. When you hear of selfishness is drowned in love, that the treasures of this world pale in comparison to the treasures of the next, of revenge and hate swept away by forgiveness, of guilt and shame covered and clothed with holiness, of when acceptance given not earned, of when the threat of judgment replaced with the joy of freedom . . . that's a life worth living. That's a life worth dying to the old way, and rising to the new way. Jesus' way.

Don't be afraid to do so! To be different in a good way. To hear the voice of your Shepherd and follow where He leads. The world may not like it. May not want to hear of it. So be it.

But once you've heard that voice, once your ears know that voice, once you've heard those promises and received those gifts, once you begin to see with your ears, then a whole new world and life await. And like Bartimaeus, one day you will see Jesus with your eyes. And your peripheral vision will see the crowd . . . *a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb* (Revelation 7:9). Bartimaeus will be there. And many more. All those who heard the voice of their Shepherd. Who saw with their ears, and now live and rejoice forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.