

(The stories of Job and Bartimaeus are both about dislocation and restoration, about reflection and action, and the power of God to work through circumstances to recreate our lives.)

Two stories – two sacred stories.

Sacred stories are stories where we find ourselves – stories where we find God.

Do these stories we read today have anything in common?

Let's think about these two stories.

Maybe they can give us some clues to how God is moving in our lives.

I bring two of them to your attention today –
primarily because the lectionary has placed them together among the scriptures recommended
for this 21st Sunday after Pentecost.

Scriptures listed for our study each Sunday in the lectionary
do not necessarily relate to one another on a consistent basis.

But these two caught my eye – and that is why I bring them to you.

So – what is happening today in these sacred stories that are meant for you and me?



Let's think about Job. This is the end of the story of Job.

It is a classic pattern – really.

Ordinary life interrupted by an event – and the hero must respond.

Like most favorite stories – it has a fairytale ending.

It all comes down to Job's response to God.

The selections for scripture for last week included a previous passage from Job.

God has told Job about the intricacies of creation –
of which Job would have no way to understand.

Job could respond in a few different ways.

He could just curl up in a ball and sulk – hoping for the best.

Or he could rail against God.

But – he takes God's challenge and responds.

Job is still confused and disoriented –
but he does find some grounding – some foundation - where he is.

And so Job does not come up with excuses
or suggestions that blame others for what has happened to him.

He quits protesting. He says:

“I have uttered what I did not understand - things I did not know.
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear – but now my eye sees you.”

Job echoes something we sometimes come to after we have endured tragedy –
after we have gone through experiences
that we think we should never have to have in our lives.

Sometimes that happens. Our experiences are relative – of course.
They are not of the same magnitude -
but they usually leave us with a humility that we would not have had.
Before those experiences we may have found ourselves ready and willing to “spout off”
about what we believe God likes or does not like.

We may have had some arrogance.
We are more able to think we know God –
before an encounter of vast proportion - like Job has had.
It gives us a new humility –
a reworked opinion of God and power - and the way the world works.

So the storyteller tells us that God restored Job and blessed him.
These words are compelling.
“And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends,
and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

What was that?
Job’s blessing was connected to his compassion for others – his prayers for others.
Pray for your friends - and your fortunes will be restored?
Is that some kind of principle?

We could reflect on the role of praying for others
in terms of our own restoration.
How does praying for others – holding the needs of others dear - restore us?

Well – we know it connects with forgiveness, and we know forgiveness and health are related.
It does have an effect on us.

Think about a time when you felt there was a connection
between your own prayers on behalf of others
and some kind of transformation in you –

or in some kind of transformation in your relationship with those for whom you prayed?¹

Let's keep that in mind – especially in how it relates to community -
our community here – or even the warring peoples of the world.



Let's make a shift now.

How is the restoration of Job similar and different then the restoration of Bartimaeus -
the blind beggar who calls out to Jesus in Jericho?

Jericho is a cosmopolitan place - a wealthy town.

The aristocracy of Jerusalem had winter homes there – beautiful homes.

Mark does not mention this. He just tells us about Bartimaeus -
this blind man sitting in the dirt.

Mark is telling us the priorities of Jesus are different.

This setting and story is an example of that.

Last week I told you about the disciples who
could not seem to understand the priorities of Jesus.

They were asking to sit at the side of Jesus when he became king -
when he became a part of the aristocracy –
when he became powerful in the way most people think of power.

Jesus is on this busy road between Jerusalem and Jericho now.

Imagine the faces of people focused on their journey - focused on where they are going.

Certainly they are looking over the head of this blind beggar.

We often want to look over the heads of the poor - the broken - the dispossessed
that are on the edges of our cities and towns -

not in the mainstream – not among the movers and shakers – not among the doers.

But - not Jesus.

Jesus does two things.

He hears the man's call.

Bartimaeus is a street beggar. He is used to calling out a thousand times a day
and used to not being heard a thousand times a day.

This time Bartimaeus is heard.

That is the first thing.

The second thing is that Jesus asks him what he wants.

Jesus engages with him. Jesus listens.

"What do you want me to do for you?"

Jesus places personal power back where it belongs – with this individual.

He does not direct a disciple to give him a hand out –

or suggest he be part of a program of some kind.

Jesus models engagement for us. He models involvement.

This is not to say that programs that help people obtain food
or medical care or education are not good.

It is not to say that programs aimed at improvement are not worthwhile. They are.

They are part of our responsibilities to one another.

I just want to highlight "engagement."

Because - if we see Jesus as the expression of God –

we are seeing demonstrated right before our eyes – the nature of God.

And – it is one of engagement and action.

Engagement and action are the things that bring healing in this story of Bartimaeus.



Let's go back to Job.

In the story of Job – something else is important in the act of restoration.

And that was reflection.

When we look at both stories we learn two things about restoration -
at least – two things about restoration – in the work of God.

Those two things are reflection and action.

Job gains insight through reflection:

“I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear - but now my eyes see you.”

He listens and observes.

Bartimaeus takes action.

When engaged - he springs up and comes to Jesus.

Both Job and Bartimaeus come to see – one through reflection and one through action.



The lesson for us is not hard to decipher.

In our own lives – restoration - recovering from loss is both reflective and active.

We want to understand how a loss has affected us.

We want to understand why it hurt so much.

So we do that by being reflective.

And then there is action - and sometimes that is changing habits -
and sometimes it is discovering new pathways – new opportunities -
finding new ways of doing things.



Most of us have some area of our lives that needs restoration at any given time.

They may not have been brought about by trauma -

or be like that of Job or of Bartimaeus – but we may still need restoration.

Some of us have something that needs restoring right now – right here today.

Sometimes our whole lives are in tatters and we need a complete overhaul.

Think about those areas of our lives that need restoration.

I have been there. Some of you have.

Perhaps it is a minor overhaul – but it still calls out to you -
just like the blind beggar calls out to Jesus.

What calls out to you might be a strained relationship – or a career or profession -
or a health condition – or an opportunity to be in ministry.

Restoration – based on Job 42:1-6, 10-17 and Mark 10:46-52
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And imagine that when you call out – there is a response.

And Jesus will ask what is needed.

And you can answer.

And beyond that – you can even begin describing
what the restoration – your restoration - will look like a few years from now.

This allows insight and action to work.

You can use the stories of Job and Bartimaeus
to prompt your own insight into why something needs to change.

And you are using the stories to help you spring forth in action.



Do you see what great stories they are?

Do you see why we call them sacred stories?

They help us engage with God.

They help us live our lives more fully.

¹ Adapted from Jana Norman and Paul Turley in *Awaken*, Pentecost 2 2009, Year B