

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – October 28, 2018

Mark 10:46-52 & Job 42:1-6, 10-17

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on biblegateway.com.)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on Mark 10:46-52

(From *Homiletics*; “How to Call for Help”, October 25, 2015)

According to Mark's gospel, Jesus has been heading south, toward the capital city, ever since his transfiguration and ministry to the surrounding villages of Caesarea Philippi (cf. 8:27; 9:2, 9, 30, 33; 10:1, 17, 32, 46; 11:1). Consequently, the final account in Mark 10 denotes the end of Jesus' migration from Galilee to Jerusalem. It also closely follows the third and final passion prediction by Jesus (cf. 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). Given the placement of the Bartimaeus anecdote, it's smart to consider the text at some length rather than viewing it merely as a transitional passage prior to Jesus' arrival at Jerusalem.

Reinforcing the premise above is the brevity with which Jericho is treated in the narrative. Rather than include details about Jesus' visit to Jericho, Mark simply records that “[Jesus] and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho” (v. 46a). More notable for Mark is the observation that, as Jesus, his disciples and the crowd were departing, they passed by “Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, [who] was sitting by the roadside” (v. 46b).

Arguably, Mark's portrayal of Bartimaeus as a “blind beggar” tacitly categorizes him as a pathetic figure, having little, if any, value. To press the point, a beggar like Bartimaeus represents the very opposite of human flourishing and productivity. In the eyes of society, he is virtually worthless; someone who exists at the bottom of the social ladder and lives at the margin. Moreover, in ancient times, individuals like Bartimaeus were extremely vulnerable, and often left to fend for themselves.

Careful reading accentuates the fact that “Bartimaeus” isn't really his given name at all. When translated, “Bartimaeus” is literally “son of Timaeus,” which means that, in essence, Mark merely repeats the beggar's surname. To put it differently, although Mark provides the father's name, he doesn't actually specify the beggar's name. However, despite the fact that the omission of the beggar's name may at first seem inconsequential, there is a subtle and profound literary aspect to it, especially given what follows.

While the entourage passes by, Bartimaeus hears (overhears) that Jesus of Nazareth is close at hand, perhaps still at the front of the crowd (see v. 32). Moreover, Bartimaeus is almost certainly already aware of Jesus' reputation based on his desperate and audacious cry, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 47). Yet in spite of Bartimaeus' respectful address and humble plea for help, some who follow Jesus “ordered him to be quiet” (v. 47a).

One question that comes to mind is why Jesus fails to respond the first time. However, given the crowd's noise, the possibility that Bartimaeus could have misjudged his proximity to Jesus, and the efforts to silence a beggar, it's easy to imagine that Jesus simply didn't hear him.

At this point, note that Mark doesn't identify whether these objectors are those of the Twelve, other disciples or members of the crowd. But whoever orders Bartimaeus to shut up, demands not only that everyone ignore him, but also unequivocally prevent his voice from joining what surely was a noisy crowd accompanying Jesus. Cruelly, Bartimaeus' antagonists exacerbate his wretched situation by their attempt to make him a mute as well. In their eyes, he is not even worthy of pity. Although it's conceivable that they were motivated by a desire to protect Jesus, their lack of compassion for a blind man does not reflect well on those who think they know best. Fortunately for Bartimaeus, Jesus hears and responds to his second cry.

Shouting "even more loudly," Bartimaeus calls out again, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (v. 48). (Incidentally, both "Son of David" and "mercy [ελεεω]" are rare in Mark, each occurring only three times. Specifically, these two terms are found in vv. 47-48; "mercy" is also used in 5:19, while "Son of David" shows up again in 12:35.)

Despite their initial attempt to hush Bartimaeus, the crowd cannot keep him from raising his voice so that Jesus can hear him. Now aware of the blind man, Jesus stops, perhaps directing those who just moments before had tried to silence him, and orders them, "Call him here" (v. 49a). To their credit, they follow Jesus' directive, and say to Bartimaeus, "Take heart [θαρσει]; get up, he is calling you" (v. 49b; cf. 6:50). As soon as Bartimaeus hears this good news, he throws "off his cloak," jumps up, and goes to Jesus.

One way to draw the listeners' attention to the exhilaration that Bartimaeus must have felt is to create a paraphrase of verses 49-50 that is more artistic and dynamic. For example, consider this: "And when they heard Jesus, they summoned the beggar, saying, 'You there! Stand up, Jesus wants to talk to you.' When Bartimaeus heard this amazing invitation, he threw off his cloak, which held every coin that people had tossed into it, and ran as fast as he could toward Jesus, being guided by Jesus' voice (or assisted by one of his disciples)."

After making his way to Jesus, Bartimaeus is greeted with an odd question. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asks (v. 51a). This query is peculiar because its answer seems absurdly obvious -- "My teacher [ραββουvi], let me see again" (v. 51b). It is worth mentioning that a fascinating parallel occurs in John 20:16, the only other NT passage where ραββουvi is used. In this instance, Mary addresses Jesus as "My teacher [ραββουvi]" and finally recognizes (sees) Jesus only after he *calls* her by name.

Returning to Mark's narrative, Jesus acknowledges and honors Bartimaeus' request. "Go; your faith has made you well" (v. 52a). This theme -- namely, that faith is a prerequisite for healing -- is found intermittently in Mark (cf. 2:5; 5:34; 6:5-6). For that reason, some attention to this facet of the narrative is probably warranted. Conversely, some caution is also advised because an absolute correspondence between faith and healing doesn't always manifest itself in our lives, or the lives of people we know and love.

The passage concludes with the immediate restoration of the beggar's sight, which allows Bartimaeus to become a follower of Jesus. As Bartimaeus' plea for sight illustrates, one real obstacle to faith -- to following Jesus -- is not blindness, but is frequently the unwillingness of the blind to ask for restoration of their sight.

Commentary on Job 42:1-6, 10-17

(From *Homiletics*; "Job finds His IDEO", October 29, 2006)

The conclusion to the book of Job, from which today's lesson is taken (42:1-6, 10-17) is as enigmatic as the rest of the book. Readers and scholars alike have found it, by turns, perplexing, consoling, unsatisfying and frustrating, and whatever comments one makes about it must be made with due regard for the provisional understanding that attends the work as a whole, and the relation of that work to the broader context of theological and philosophical literature in general. Indeed, as one commentator has put it, "When people compare their opinions about the

fittingness of 42:7-17 as a conclusion for the book of Job, differences of opinion about this ending often turn out to be related to differences of opinion about the nature of life itself, whether existence has a fundamentally tragic structure or a comedic structure” (Carol Newsom, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996], vol. 4, 637).

Today’s lesson is part of the climactic ending of the book, which is comprised of two parts: (1) God’s speech to Job from the whirlwind and Job’s response (38:1-42:6), and (2) the description of Job’s restored life (42:7-17). The verses omitted by the lectionary are God’s rebuke of Job’s friends and Job’s intercession on their behalf (42:7-9). Although the omission satisfies the lectionary’s need for a unified reading, it seriously compromises an adequate understanding of the ending as a work of art and as a theological statement. This dramatic climax — the Lord’s first direct address to Job and Job’s only direct response to the Lord — has been anticipated by much of the content of the book, but especially by the prediction of the “satan” (the adversary) in 1:11 and 2:5 that, given the chance, Job would curse the deity to his face in response to Job’s travails. Job’s railing has led one to anticipate such a possibility, but the actual response turns out to be quite different, one of the many unanticipated twists in this story.

The passage begins with Job’s response to the Lord (Yahweh — one of the noteworthy features of the book is its several designations for the divinity), who has just asked Job, in two detailed speeches (38:1-40:5 and 40:6-41:34), whether Job’s knowledge and abilities extend to the creation and management of the natural world, elaborately (and sometimes whimsically, 41:5) described by the Lord. The purpose of the speech(es) is to confront (and crush) Job’s sense of moral outrage at his treatment with the larger, cosmic framework in which Job’s life runs its course, and in which Job’s perspective is painfully constrained.

Job begins his response to this literal put-down by acknowledging divine power, that the Lord can do all things and that no purpose of the Lord’s can be thwarted (42:2). As indicated by the single quotation marks in the NRSV, verse 3a is a near-quotation of God’s words to Job in 38:2, a rhetorical question that needs no answer. The second half of 42:3 acknowledges the truth of the first part (and 38:2), although the acknowledgement either exaggerates the facts (Job does, in fact, understand and know that he did not deserve his sufferings) or responds to only a portion of the narrative (God’s description of the mysteries of creation). This ambiguity is one of the many that give the book its enduring appeal.

Another near-quotation occurs in verse 4 (echoing 38:3b and 40:7b), and the introduction of the verb “Hear” (which occurs in neither of the original verses) prepares the hearer or reader for Job’s response in verse 5, where he contrasts his hearing of the Lord in the past with his seeing of the Lord now.

There are a number of ways to interpret this exchange, but the most likely seems to be that Job has come to an awareness of the divine he did not have before. Although the phrase “the hearing of the ear” is unique to this passage, its use here seems to describe unreliable or unconfirmed information, such as rumors or secondhand reports (cf. also 28:22 and Psalm 18:44; the phrase “in the hearing of” ordinarily simply means “in the presence of” or “overheard by”; cf. Genesis 23:10, 13; Exodus 24:7; Numbers 11:1). In contrast, to see the divine with the eyes was a privilege rarely accorded individuals, and was thought to be accompanied by mortal danger (cf. Hagar’s statement in Genesis 16:13; Moses’ request to see God in Exodus 33:12-23; and Isaiah’s fearful temple vision, Isaiah 6:1; in contrast, see Exodus 24:9-11). The contrast Job seems to be making, then, is that he once heard of God’s ways (from his friends and from his religious tradition, both of which conflicted with his lived experience), but now he has indeed “seen” (i.e., experienced) how God actually operates, and now he understands. In other words, now Job gets it.

The NRSV (along with a number of other translations) translates the first half of verse 6 as “therefore I despise myself,” supplying a direct object for the verb *ma’as*, “reject, despise,” that does not appear in the Hebrew text. Various proposals have been suggested (including taking the following set phrase, “dust and ashes” as the object of both verbs), resulting in a wide range of translations with an equally wide range of meanings. For a list of various translations of the verse, as well as a summary of the scholarly discussion of the grammatical and syntactical issues involved, see Newsom, 629.

What, exactly, Job is repenting of in the expression “dust and ashes” is not entirely certain, as the phrase can describe the human condition in general, especially human finitude (e.g., Genesis 18:27), or it can also describe being placed in abject humiliation or degradation (as appears earlier in the book of Job, 30:19). Job may be

repudiating the human perspective he brought to divine mysteries, or he may be affirming his newfound awareness and denying the need for further humiliation. The ambiguity of these, Job's final words, is almost certainly deliberate.

With verse 7, the poetic section of the book is concluded, and the prose framework that opened the tale (1:1-2:13) resumes. Verses 7-9 are comprised of a divine rebuke to Job's friends, for which they offer sacrifice and Job offers a successful expiating prayer.

Verses 10-17 describe the restoration and enlargement of Job's fortunes. Many readers (and, presumably, hearers) have found this section of the book deeply unsatisfying, as it appears to confirm the central theological tenet espoused collectively by Job's three friends: The righteous are rewarded (and the wicked are punished). Such a view, foundational to Deuteronomistic and prophetic theology, is extremely difficult to reconcile with the deity's statement to Job's friends in 42:7, that they "have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." Various proposals to smooth the rough edges have been offered, usually involving a "history of composition" of the book approach, i.e., that the conflict is the result of two different, incompatible theological perspectives from two different periods and authors. While such an approach resolves the conflict, it avoids the problem of the canonical text as we have it.

Job's fortunes are not simply restored. In the first place, they are doubled: "and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before" (v. 10). Job's family and friends also return to him, overcoming the alienation that had proved so bitter to him earlier (19:13-22). In addition to showing him sympathy and comfort, they also gave him a gold ring and a *qesitah*, an unknown term that appears to designate either an amount of money or a weight of precious metals (v. 11). Job's herds also flourish (v. 12).

Job is also blessed with new children (not restored children): seven sons and three daughters, according to the NRSV (v. 13). The word used for seven, however, is unusual (*shib`ana*), and may be a dual form, designating not seven but double seven, i.e., 14 (see also 1 Chronicles 25:5, where God exalts the temple official Heman with *fourteen* sons and three daughters). Fourteen sons, an exceptionally large number, would correspond with the exceptional nature of Job's daughters (on whom the author dwells while supplying relatively little real information), and the exceptional length of Job's post-disaster life (140 years, twice the normal life span; cf. Psalm 90:10). The book closes with the statement that Job died "old and full of days," an echo of the formulas designating a blessed life (Genesis 25:8; 35:29; 1 Chronicles 29:28).

No mention is made of the removal of Job's physical affliction or the appearance of a second wife (since Job's first wife was the mother of 10 grown children at the beginning of the book and it seems unlikely that she remained fertile long enough to bear 17 children more). These cavils bear little on the text, however, which is folklore and not history, and the point, regardless of the specifics, remains: Job's latter days more than compensated for his earlier suffering, not necessarily as a reward for his faithfulness, but simply as an unmerited blessing.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

Reflection Questions on Mark 10:46-52:

1. From Mark G. Vitalis Hoffman (*Commentary*, workingpreacher.org, 10/25/2015): *What about the “many” who “rebuke” Bartimaeus for crying out to Jesus? Are they seeking to preserve Jesus’ honor? Are they trying to control access to Jesus like the disciples did when they stopped someone casting out demons in Jesus’ name? (9:38-39) Or are they embarrassed about Bartimaeus’ low status as a blind beggar? Are we similarly complicit in marginalizing and silencing those who would seek healing and mercy today?*
2. Why does Jesus not respond to Bartimaeus directly, but instead send others to call the blind man to him? Is there a subtle lesson to his disciples in this action? A formative test for Bartimaeus? Something else?
3. Jesus tells Bartimaeus that his “faith” has made him well (v. 52). What is the connection between faith and healing? How should those who have great faith but do not experience healing receive and understand this story?

Reflection Questions on Job 42:1-6, 10-17:

1. From Karla Suomala (*Commentary*, workingpreacher.org, 10/25/2015): *Just as in the earlier verse where Job claims that he didn’t know or understand, we aren’t quite sure what the content of his recanting or repenting are. Is he withdrawing his entire case? His claims to innocence? His demands for justice? [Is it] possible that Job is rejecting or renouncing his previous ideas about God -- his entire sense that God simply functions as a machine that processes human behavior, rewarding and punishing accordingly?*
2. In the end, Job’s fortunes are restored. Would the value and meaning of his story change if they were not? Does the end justify the means for whatever wisdom Job has gained through his ordeal? Does his ultimate “reward” not reaffirm the very worldview that most of Job’s story has subverted?

What questions do you have?

What do you “wonder” about when reading these passages?