

Sermon Text for March 30, 2025

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Psalm 146:5-10 and Matthew 20:29-34

“What happens when you see?”

I don't take for granted the choice that you make to come to church here and to be involved in life with each other in this family. It is a confusing world in which we live and we are always looking for insights and direction and some way in which to get clarity for a whole host of issues where we have to make decisions. Our young adult Sunday School class is really enjoying a book on parenting because there are so many voices telling us to do different things. One set of parents tells us to let the child cry himself to sleep and the other tells us to jump up right away and make sure that they are cared for. We have a myriad of choices in all decisions that we make in life and it is sometimes hard to know which advice to take and from whom.

The same is true in our outlook on the world as well. There are so many different sources out there on where to get our news and often how we get our news dictates a lot of our beliefs and our approaches to certain issues and certain beliefs and practices. We are constantly asking ourselves which crowd are we to follow and often when we make up our mind we will follow that crowd no matter what they are proposing and no matter where it leads us.

This then leads us to a place where we will also follow the crowd in understanding how God is at work in certain situations in our own life and in world events as well. It is hard to decide what to believe and it is hard to understand in what direction are we to go for basically all things in life. How do we choose and how do we decide. We can feel blind, as if we are just hanging onto the person in front of us in a crowd that is leading us in a direction that we are not sure where it will eventually lead us.

But it is here where we live life together that hopefully we are able to get some clarity on what God actually wants for us in our lives. I mean, we can choose to follow individuals and crowds and have no idea where that will lead us, but we believe that an actual clear path is set before us by Scripture which reflects Jesus' desire and wish for us in our own lives and which will then impact our understanding of world events and what we ought to support and get behind.

We are blind when we just try to figure it out on our own because it will lead us to follow one crowd or another and often we will choose to follow the one who is the loudest or seems to exhibit the most power or strength, which we have seen that this is not the way of the Gospel, but we tend to follow that way when left to our own devices. Today both Scriptures provide us with a clear path to follow which often goes against the crowd, goes against the loudest voice, goes

against whimsical displays of power. But it always goes in the direction of righteousness, that theme that we have been looking at for the last 2 plus years. Let's read.

READ

In a world that is always changing, and often at speeds that take our breath away and leave us bewildered, I am often amazed at the consistency and the timelessness of Scripture. When we find ourselves at a loss to understand what direction to go, Scripture provides us with answers that are consistent and which always lead us in the right path to decision making. Our first reading is an example of such a Scripture that is reflected in many different places and not just in Psalm 146. This Psalm is called a psalm for the Savior of the downtrodden. We even have in vs.8 a shout out to our theme over these years as we read the Lord loves the righteous. So again, we see this consistency of appealing to us to live as people who value righteousness over all things. We are called over and over again to act according to the will of God. This ought to be the bedrock of our decision making.

But what does that righteousness look like according to the psalmist and according to our life in the 21st century? Is what we see happening around us today righteousness or good and how do I tell so that I know what to support or not? It can be really confusing because we may have supported things in the past but now things are happening that are having a negative affect on your own personal life. Today it might seem like what I used to support is actually hurting me and my family, and when I take a broader look at it, it doesn't seem like righteousness at all, and you've never thought of things that way before and it makes you feel like you have to go against the crowd that you have always hung with and that you have always been with.

In the past we may have thought that we could do our own research and come up with our own answers as to what is best for me and my family. But now not so much. So where do we get our insight, I would say that God is able to provide that for us, and even provide answers that were in front of us all along but because we were following the crowd, and not the directives we find in Scripture, we might have missed it. Psalm 146 we see the terms that God uses to do his work which is, look at the verses, execute justice for the oppressed, do we see that happening around us and where?

We read that God gives food to the hungry, and doesn't take it away, is that happening around us and are we with our food bank making sure our policies line up with giving out as much food to the needy as we can at all times? Are prisoners set free or put in jail especially in light of the radically disproportionate number of African American male who are in prison and why the system is set up for that. Are the eyes of the blind being opened or is aid being removed

from them. Are strangers and immigrants welcomed or are they put in prison? Is the orphan and the widow being supported or are their means of livelihood being taken away?

There is a way of discerning what is the will of God and what is not and it doesn't have anything to do with which side of the political aisle we might find ourselves, it has everything to do with the consistency of Scripture which never changes and always leads us to the same path, which is righteousness. When we focus on God's desire and wish for our lives and this world then the way becomes clearer, especially as we step away from the crowd in which we have found ourselves and look to God consistently for guidance and direction because God is willing to give it if we would just open our eyes.

Jesus always found himself in the middle of crowds who wanted him to do certain things and always gave him unsolicited advice on his life and on the life of those around him. But even in the midst of these pressures that he experienced and the tugs and pulls of his life he was amazingly consistent and never strayed from the direction that he set out as not only the Savior of all humankind, who was, as we saw last week, the ransom for sin for all of us, but also as the one who was able to give us direction and insight on how we ought to live our life and what we should support and encourage and what we should not.

In Matthew 20 we find ourselves in the last week of Jesus' life, we are right on the brink of Palm Sunday. Last week we saw him remind his disciples, tell his disciples for the third time that they are heading into Jerusalem and just in a few days he will be arrested, condemned to death, tortured, mocked, hung on a cross, but don't worry, even though I will be crucified, on the third day I will be raised again. So he has a lot on his mind and there is a lot that has to get done. He has to clean out a temple, he has to have the last supper with his disciples. He's busy!

He is surrounded by a large crowd as they make their way toward Jerusalem and toward his passion week and they pass by Jericho, which to this day was considered, and honestly still is considered a bit of a backward town and so one where you wouldn't want to slow down and stop, but you just keep going and go directly to Jerusalem. Do not stop, just keep going because there are important things that are going to be happening in Jerusalem. Jericho didn't have a great reputation, the people didn't.

Two of the cities citizens call out to Jesus, they were on the side of the road, they were blind, they were probably begging for funds to cover their meal. They call out loudly to get his attention and this Scripture then sets up this type of competition between the blind men who are calling out to Jesus and the crowds who are surrounding Jesus telling them to be quiet and encouraging Jesus to keep going. There is this competition between these two blind men who

have no agency and the crowd which seemed to be able to make all the calls and dictate what Jesus would and would not do, which included Jesus certainly not stopping and paying attention to them.

The crowd flexes its muscle by telling the blind men to be quiet. But the blind men, those who had no power, no ability, no connections that meant anything, all they had was their voice, that's all they had, and they used what they had and cried even louder. You know whose side you are on is often dictated by the crowd that you follow and what they believe regardless of what Scripture and Jesus tells us. Conversely sometimes all you have is your voice to get people to pay attention to that which is most needed and that which most closely tracks with the Gospel and not what the crowd wants.

Look at vs.32, Jesus stops, Jesus stands still. He goes against the crowd and does that which Psalm 146 demands that he does. He doesn't ask around to others wondering what they think he should do, he notices and addresses the need. Why does he do that? Scripture states that he was moved by compassion and it was the right thing to do. So much of the public discourse that we have happening around us in our crowds completely leaves out compassion. We are so focus on the goal that is ahead of us, whether it be saving money, or making sure that we are safe, or protecting our self interests, that compassion is left out of the conversation.

So often the crowds would keep us going and so we end up doing the wrong thing because we don't stop and ask the questions is this the direction that Jesus would have me going on? Who could blame them, there are more important things up ahead of us and our priorities are separated by an individual who has the ability to receive compassion. This isn't the first time that we see Jesus in Jericho noticing people who have been unnoticed by the crowds. Remember Zaccheus who also wanted to see Jesus, or Bartimeaus who also wanted to see Jesus, in each of those times Jesus is with the crowds who would have had him do something different than show compassion, but Jesus can't anything different than show compassion, which is what we are called to do when we see the way of Jesus.

In those instances the faith of the healed Bartimeaus and the faith of the tax collector Zaccheus is raised up as significant. Here, instead, the faith of the healed is replaced with the compassion of the healer. Even as he makes his way to the cross he will not let the cry of the needy go unheard. Jesus on his way to his death in Jerusalem does not cease from being the Messiah who meets the needs of individuals.

Nothing, no earthly good that someone sets before us should ever eliminate our ability to clearly see what God actually wants in our life. For when we see it we remove ourselves from

the crowd which wants to ride triumphantly and place ourselves on the side of Jesus who willingly rides unto his death so that we could be saved from our sins. When we love Jesus, our task is to follow him and not the wave of the crowd and the direction that they take us for the way of righteousness is very different from the way of the crowd. Amen.