

A sermon for Reformation Sunday based on Mark 10: 46-52, preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 25 October 2015.

Many years ago I heard Malcolm Muggeridge speak in the Anglican Cathedral in Auckland. Muggeridge had been the acerbic atheist of his time, the editor of Punch, the critic of Christianity. Peering over his decapitated glasses he related how meeting Mother Teresa changed his life. This is what he wrote about that encounter ...

“Suddenly, almost like a click, like a film coming into sync, everything has meaning, everything is real: and the meaning, the reality, shines out in every shape and sound and movement, in every manifestation of life ... How, I ask myself, could I have missed it before? How could I not have understood that the grey-silver light across the water, the cry of the sea gulls and the sweep of their wings, everything on which my eyes rest and my ears hear, is telling me about God?”

The silver light across the water, the sea gulls cry, the sweep of their wings, everything I see telling me about God.

But God does not crowd us out of the picture. God does not fill the space. In the text today we see human initiative and grace entwined. Grace evoking human response.

Bartimaeus “began to shout out and say “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” They sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly: “Son of David, have mercy on me.””

Loud persistence. Stubborn perseverance. Irrepressible spirit.

We see it too in the life of John Knox. As we will hear, even when unsure, even when depressed, even as fortunes ebbed and flowed, Knox held to a vision and he stubbornly, resolutely, persistently sought to express that vision.

So much so that even John Calvin asked him to tone it down. That persistence, that vision changed the face of Scotland.

It was no small vision. It was no small change. It embraced his land ... and others, his people ... and others.

The shouting stopped Jesus in his tracks – he stood still. No mean feat given Jesus was concluding his Galilean ministry and heading for Jerusalem, to the centre of power, for the encounter that would define his life.

He had set his face to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was impelling him forward, calling him ever so painfully to his ultimate moment.

Jesus stood still. And he said to the others – “call him here”. It was not Jesus who called him – it was they, they called him. “Take heart, get up, he is calling you,” they said.

Who called to you? Who gave you heart? Who encourages you to take initiative? Who tells you to get up?

For John Knox it was George Wishart, martyred in the courtyard of St Andrew’s University.

They. They did enough for Bartimaeus to throw off his cloak, spring up and go. The rich man could not throw off what he had, and he walked away, alone. This blind man trusted enough to throw off his possession, to spring up and go.

"Traveling from the known to the unknown requires crossing an abyss of emptiness. We first experience disorientation and confusion. Then if we are willing to cross the abyss in curious and playful wonder, we enter an expansive and untamed country that has its own rhythm. Time melts and thoughts become stories, music, poems, images, ideas." Dawna Markova, *I Will Not Die an Unlived Life*

So Jesus asks Bartimaeus – “What do you want me to do for you?”

Grace questions. Grace evokes. Grace encourages the human choice, the human vision, human initiative.

What do you want of Jesus? It seems your answer to that question has a lot to do with what happens to you in life, with what becomes of you in life, with what you receive from life.

Last week we heard how James and John wanted a special place in the kingdom.

For me, it was once meaning and purpose. At another time it was forgiveness and a sense of worth. At another time it was feeling I was giving myself to something of significance, of benefit, of worth. At another time it was just getting through, the strength to persevere. At another time it was the courage to act.

What do you want of Jesus? *I Will Not Die an Unlived Life* by Dawna Markova (Feb 11, 2008)

I will not die an unlived life
 I will not live in fear
 of falling or catching fire.
 I choose to inhabit my days,
 to allow my living to open me,
 to make me less afraid,
 more accessible,
 to loosen my heart
 until it becomes a wing,
 a torch, a promise.

I choose to risk my significance;
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit.

At the end, Jesus tells Bartimaeus to go, but Bartimaeus does not go. Instead Bartimaeus follows Jesus on the way.

Stubborn perseverance

Dignity affirmed

Courageous choosing

Faithful disobedience