

Blind Bartimaeus
9:00 a.m., October 25, 2009
Trinity Episcopal Church, Aurora
The Rev. Charles A. de Kay

May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our God.

Please be seated.

Good morning!

Two nights ago, in the middle of the night, I received a distress call from a complete stranger. The woman who was calling from Rush-Copley told a harrowing story of being far from home for medical treatment of a brain tumor, of her release from the hospital in Chicago, of being invited to move to a better outpatient facility in the Western suburbs, only to be sexually harassed, robbed, and dumped off at Copley.

Sometimes it seems that the world has changed under our feet. Sometimes it seems that all of the things that we used to count on have been stolen from us.

Once we felt safe in our jobs, and then they were shipped overseas.

Once loyalty and dedication to an employer were regularly rewarded, and then seemingly overnight that promise vanished.

Once we believed our country was immune to the troubles of the world, and then 9/11 happened.

Once we felt our money we tucked away in our retirement accounts was safe and growing, and then the recession hit and suddenly we learn what we have is worth a fraction of what it had been. That's if we're lucky and they're still worth anything at all. Between financial investments made in companies that didn't weather the recession and those made with unscrupulous investors, like Bernie Maddoff, highly educated con-men in silk suits – some of us have lost all our savings.

Once it seemed we lived in a Christian country, where the culture would reinforce the values, the lessons, our kids learned in Sunday school. As Vicki Garvey noted when she visited Trinity a couple of weeks back, that's simply no longer the case. The rampant bad behavior, the self-serving greediness of individuals and institutions alike, demonstrates that's no longer the case.

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We don't know who to trust. Can we trust anyone? Any institution?

Then there are those who would use our very real fears to manipulate us, to control our every move. It's profitable, some have found, to keep us off-balance, to keep us scared.

All of this, all of this may make us, understandably, want to shut down. All of this may make us turn inward, turn off. Some of us escape into video games, whether it's Playstation, Wii, or Solitaire. Some of us escape into cable television. Or the internet. Others escape with gambling. Or with drink. All of this free-floating anxiety pushes us down, shutting us off from reality. From life.

Or all of this may make us feel as if we, too, should grab for our piece of the pie regardless of the cost to others, to the environment, to life.

We have another choice. The spiritual life is one of opening up, of reaching outward, of intentionally becoming vulnerable for the sake of something bigger than ourselves.

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My friends, the world hasn't changed all that much. Most of us are still trying to get along the best we can with what we've got.

It's when we give into the despair, when we feel penned in, when we feel trapped, when we actually come to believe the lie that we have no options, that we're powerless, that we have no hope and when we give into those lies that we become dangerous. Look at the worst offenders – the rampaging school killers, the gang members roaming the streets, the suicide bombers – and you'll see a pattern of belief – a belief in their own powerlessness, their own hopeless situation. Extrapolate that across the strata of life to the less immediately threatening no-goodniks: the industrial polluters, to the predator loan officials and on and on and you'll see men and women who've bought into the lies: which boils down, essentially to – this is what everyone else is doing, I have no power, I don't have any choice, it's the only way to survive.

And it's all a lie.

We all have the choice to embrace life as a sacred gift. To seek God where God wills to be found. To get right with God, asking forgiveness for our mistakes, for we all make them all the time. To be like a child and put our whole trust in God and stand back and watch what happens. To be blinded with awe and wonder at the strange otherness that is life on our planet. To shout and to dance. To rejoice and give thanks. To give ourselves over in grateful surrender to a loving God who wants to see us whole – body, mind and spirit.

Bartimaeus, son of Timeaus, a blind beggar was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him to me. And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So, throwing off his cloak, he sprang

up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Sometimes we get to play the role of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, the blind beggar sitting by the roadside. Sometimes we really need help. And sometimes what we need seems more than we have any right to ask of another. Sometimes it’s outrageous.

Sometimes we get to play the role of Jesus, and offer help beyond what’s reasonable.

Two nights ago, in the middle of the night, I received a distress call from a complete stranger. It was still dark when I arrived at the hospital. She was sitting in a corner, looking scared, watching all of her possessions – which were stacked up outside – through the window, as the hospital staff would not allow her to bring all of the bags and small appliances inside. We spoke for a bit, she and I, and then I picked up her fight for the very last piece – I’ve no idea how many different people she had appealed to before she reached me, but for all of her fear (and it was palpable), and growing sense of disempowerment, she had fought for hours to keep hope alive and to see options where other might have given up. I simply fought with my own tiredness, and cash machines and cab companies and even the driver who came to pick her up. But we managed to work through it, and get her back to the assisted living facility in Chicago where she would be safe.

After seeing the cab drive off, I drove back to the relative safety and warmth of my own home, and I was flooded with a sense of gratitude – I thanked God that I had been allowed to help, even if perhaps the help seemed a bit outrageous. It cost \$80 to get her back to Chicago. Then again, it’s only money, and in our family, we’ve never once regretted being generous. It seemed a small price to pay for her peace of mind. To get her back on the path. I realized what I was feeling was wonder and awe and joy. Through the physical sensations of tiredness, I felt alive and awake – awake as I hadn’t felt in weeks. As I came into the downtown it was still dark, I saw a man who looked like he could use some help and my heart leapt out toward him...

We all have options. When we choose to give into the fear and hunker down, shutting our eyes and our hearts to reality, let’s remember that it’s a choice. When we give into the fear and grab at wealth regardless of whom or what we hurt, let’s remember that that, too, is a choice. How much better, my friends, to choose the other path – the path of open and transparent engagement, the path of vulnerability and outrageous generosity, the path of living the glorious, strange, and beautiful life we’ve been given.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.