

SERMON: 2018/10/28 (23rd Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - *Job* 42:1-6, 10-17; *Psalms* 34:1-8,19-22; *Hebrews* 7:23-28; and, *Mark* 10:46-52_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

I read something in bed this week that shocked me;
shocked(!) me...

If you know anything about the Comic-book universe, you probably know that one of the "greatest" criminals - perhaps *the* worst of them all(!) - is an egg-like-bald billionaire called Alexander Luthor - or "Lex" - 'the world's smartest man'.^[n.1] Born in a slum;^[n.2] but brilliant in nearly *every* way, he once even cheated death by cloning himself - creating a new, younger body - into which he transferred his scheming, nefarious mind.

Beaten again and again by Superman, however, Lex eventually gave up trying to murder the Man of Steel and take over the world, and became himself a hero: Flying around Metropolis in a mechanical, weaponised suit that gave him "powers."

But, I learned, in the most recent issue of *Justice League*, being a hero felt 'meaningless':^[n.3]

The battle against "bad stuff" - against theft, lying, killing, corruption, bullying, pollution, laziness - seemed unending.

As soon as he had helped make the world a better place, you see, a new problem appeared; a new menace.

So, he made a time-machine, and travelled to the distant future - to the *very* end of the universe.

And do you know what he found (when he got there)?

He finds that the villains have won!

That's right: *the bad guys*.

Seemingly, it took them thousands of years, but eventually they beat Batman, Flash and the other "do gooders," and came out on top.

And why?!

Because, it is explained, 'society stopped fooling itself', and 'the people embraced what they really were on the inside', which was 'ugly'.

'They stopped' trying to be 'better'.^[n.4]

And sometimes the real world looks like it might be headed in that direction. Sometimes you might feel that your little(, personal) world is headed in that direction.

Which is why the words - the prayer - in (The Book of) *Job* are so important this

morning:

'[Y]ou [God] can do *all* things, and...no purpose of yours can be thwarted.'

"Thwarted" means stopped.

Nothing that God decides to do - His *plan* - can be *stopped* by anybody else.

And what we hear (in the letter to the *Hebrews* - our second reading) is that what He has decided to do is to 'save those who approach [Him]' by His Son, Jesus. To bring them back to life in a 'new heaven and a new earth'. [Rev. 21:1]

Which is why, like the Psalmist, we should 'bless the LORD at all times'. [Ps. 34:1]

Because, eventually, He *will* win.

Not "the bad guys."

God.

Let's pray: Father God, ???, in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

Look at verse 46 (again): '[Jesus and His friends] came to Jericho.'

And then they left.

Is this the most uneventful verse in all of the Bible?

It could be!

And how are we to interpret that?

That they got there but didn't find what they were looking for?

Or perhaps they arrived and promptly forgot why they'd gone in the first place:

I've done that: gone to a cupboard - strode there with real purpose from somewhere else in the house, opened the (little) door and then stood staring at the contents, completely uncertain as to why I'd made the "journey" across the room. What was I after again? It's like I've been "whammied;" hypnotized by the "junk" inside.

Was it salt or pepper I needed?

Scotch-tape?

A snack" Am I even hungry? [Pause.]

Alternatively, was Jesus expecting to meet someone who didn't show up?

(Did He have an appointment that "fell through"?)

It's possible!

- Nicodemus, remember, came to converse with Christ '[at] night', [Jn. 3:1] and he did that because, as a Sadducee - someone who was supposed to have *deep*, irresolvable theological and political differences with our Savior - he was embarrassed to be seen by his colleagues or their spies.

But his curiosity got the better of him: it overwhelmed his misgivings and so he came to Jesus in secret.

And maybe something similar was supposed to happen in Jericho?
Perhaps another important person - a dignitary - made an arrangement through the Apostles to have a clandestine discussion, but they then "lost their bottle" at the last minute.

(Is that just a British phrase, by the way?
To "lose one's bottle"?
It means to "chicken out." To "turn yella!")

It's fun to speculate as to the various possibilities isn't it?

All the Synoptics mention that Jesus visited Jericho with His disciples - that's all the gospels but *John*.

He doesn't bother.

And why?

Because it really had been a waste of everybody's time?

Inconsequential?

Well, notice that as they 'were leaving', 'a large crowd' was with them. [\[Mk. 10:46\]](#)

Where had it come from?

It wasn't mentioned as they arrived.

In fact, the last time we find the the words "large crowd" in *Mark* is *way*(!) back in chapter 5. [\[v.24\]](#)

And lots had happened since then!

Lots and lots.

And they'd covered loads of ground too: *miles* of it.

Indeed, thinking back to the episode we "explored" last week - that of James and John making fools of themselves asking about (fancy) thrones in the Kingdom-which-is-to-come, the whole setting and feel of that awkward incident had one of intimacy about it; that it happened as they were walking *between* places, out on the road in the open countryside.

Just the twelve and their rabbi.

So, the question, then, is what happened to *attract* lots of new followers in Jericho?

Who are these strangers that have appeared suddenly in the narrative if nothing happened there?

It doesn't make much sense.

Is this a "What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas"?

(No.)

Or is it that the miracles of Jesus were coming so thick and fast that our author doesn't even bother mentioning them all. These miracles over which he passes in silence would have drawn a crowd, but to Peter - who, remember, is very likely the

person who dictated this story to the gospel writer - probably became somewhat immune to the "wow!" factor; and certainly not everything that Jesus said is recorded:

Consider, if you were to time yourself saying aloud all His teachings, it would last only an hour or so.

But Jesus was exhaustless in His preaching, and He did it for three years.

Much, then, *is* - without a doubt - being "glossed" over.

Saint John admits as much: chapter 21, verse 25 - 'But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.'

And some of those 'many other things' must, then, have taken place in Jericho. They just didn't "push the envelope" in a way that was worth noting.

Notice too that *Mark* tells us that there was 'a blind beggar', 'sitting' by the city gate, [Mk. 10:46] as Jesus was leaving with His 'large crowd' in tow. He's even given a name - "Bartimaeus," which is significant: it is significant because it is evidence that this gospel was written at a time when he was a known person in the Church; [n.5] a "face" on Sunday mornings. Imagine that!

Imagine that you were Bartimaeus and imagine hearing *your* name being spoken by the person reading the Scriptures; living, breathing evidence of the reality of God's love for His creation - of the incarnation.

Richard Bauckham - one of the very best scholars alive at the moment - says:

'[M]any of these named characters were eyewitnesses who not only originated the traditions to which their names are attached but also continued to tell these stories as authoritative guarantors of their traditions. ...the Evangelists may well have known them.' [n.6]

And there is, in fact, much evidence - internal and external - that tells us that *Mark* was written within the lifetimes of many who knew Jesus in the flesh as the *first* gospel.

This is called "The Markan Priority."

And the theory is that the manuscript of *Mark* was "floating" around the Mediterranean, being "gobbled" up by hungry converts, and among them *Matthew* and *Luke*, who then used it as a skeleton on which they then hung oral testimony peculiar to communities other than the one *Mark* had originally been written for. These other communities - or, rather, "congregations" - didn't know Bartimaeus so they dropped it.

It was superfluous detail, distracting from what was really important: that Jesus had proven Himself the Messiah by healing men and women where doctors and medicine and common-sense had failed.

But let me tell you this: *Matthew* specifies - corrects, if you like - that there were 'two' blind men that day, [20:30] languishing outside Jericho. *Two*. And 'they

shouted' at Christ, and asked for mercy 'on us'. And 'they said to Him, "LORD, let our eyes be opened."

This miracle, in other words, was 100% more wonderful on that hot day than *Mark* lets on; *doubly* life-changing.

And what a wonderful image it is: of two men looking out for each other and both realizing, *together*, simultaneously, their inadequacy and brokenness without Jesus and His 'way' [Mk. 10:53].

May we have the same courage to cry and reach out to Him, even in public, and invite Him to fix us, and then to join the "large crowd" that follows Him, come rain or shine, amen.

Footnotes:

1. Tynion, James T., IV; Mendoza, Jaime & Mahnke, Doug (August 2018), *Justice League #5*, Burbank, C. A.: DC Comics, 9.
2. Hudnall, James D.; Barreto, Eduardo; Kubert, Adam & Oakley, Bill (1989), *Lex Luthor: The Unauthorized Biography*, Burbank, C. A.: DC Comics, 42.
3. Tynion et al. (2018), 9.
4. *Ibid.*, 13.
5. See: Bauckham, Richard (2006), *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., esp. pp. 39-66.
6. *Ibid.*, 39..