

25 October 2015 (22nd Sunday After Pentecost/30th Sunday in Ordinary Time)—
Reformation Sunday
Lafayette Presbyterian Church
“Stewards of Wholeness”
Mark 10:46-52

Department stores are famous for coming up with catchy phrases that grab your attention and draw you through their doors. And they're very good at it. After all, they have armies of highly paid professionals whose sole job it is to market the brand. One afternoon several years ago I was walking through a shopping mall in front of Nordstrom's, and there in large banners on either side of the entrance were the words, “Reinvent yourself.” Wow. Reinvent yourself. You mean, I could walk into Nordstrom's and emerge a new person? Who'd have thought? Of course, if you interviewed the average shopper and asked them the question, “Do you think you can be reinvented, transformed, by a department store?,” they would probably look at you as if you had a tree growing out of your head. What an absurd thought! Department stores want to sell stuff, and they want you to buy it. Everybody knows that. Merchants don't have any interest in your wellbeing or in the condition of your immortal soul. No doubt they want to make you happy, because if they make you happy you will return to buy more stuff. But do stores care about you as a person, as a whole being with needs and dreams and wants? If only personal reinvention were that easy.

There is a part of us deep within that realizes the need for reform. We know that we are not all we can be, or all that we should be, but we sense that the road to reinvention and reformation may be a bit more involved than a trip to the store. Indeed, reformation is, in many ways, the recovery and restoration of something essential that we have lost. Every time we make a bad decision, or a selfish one, or do not live in a way that honors the Christ we love and serve, we lose a little something from ourselves. We become like a piece of fabric that has holes in it, or that is frayed and in need of repair. This was the impulse that moved Martin Luther and John Calvin and others in the sixteenth century to address the church in strong and no uncertain terms: what was needed then was a plea to the church to return to Christ, and in our Reformed tradition we believe that every generation must hear that same plea. Whether it is the call of Israel's prophets to return to the God who had brought them out of Egypt, or the call of Jesus to become the children of God, or the call of any number of Reformed prophets to turn again to the ground of our redemption in Christ, or the call of modern prophets and preachers to return to the origin and author of our faith—the call to reform amounts to a call to wholeness. And it is based on the awareness that none of us can be whole apart from a personal relationship with the God who made us and who has the power to restore us.

In Mark's account of the healing of Bartimaeus, we find the message that has repeatedly inspired and moved the people of God, the message with which we have been entrusted as stewards. It is an account of wholeness restored, of blindness healed, of a man whom no one else was interested in listening to, finding in Jesus someone who recognized a yearning for wholeness. We do not know the circumstances of

Bartimaeus's blindness. We do not know whether he was born blind, or whether he suffered an injury or illness that left him blind. All we do know is that he was a beggar, and that when he became aware of Jesus' presence he cried out for him so loudly, he made an annoying pest of himself. But, like the Syrophenician woman who annoyed the disciples with her persistent pleas for help, Bartimaeus impressed Jesus with his faith. He wanted to be whole, and he recognized in Jesus the one who could help him. It was that simple. And Mark's Gospel preserves that message for the church for a reason: the world is crying out for wholeness, and it looks to us for good news. What will we tell them? Do we know what to tell them? Do we know the message with which we have been entrusted as stewards?

As the church, the body of Christ in this time and place, we are stewards—caretakers, guardians—of a message that the world yearns to hear. We are stewards of wholeness. We offer hope for an enduring life of joy, despite present circumstances, to those who have lost hope and who feel like a piece of cloth that has so many holes, it is hard to tell what it was supposed to look like, or is so frayed at the edges, it is hard to figure out what its original dimensions were. As those who have experienced the restoring love of Christ, we have been tasked with making sure that that message is transmitted to those who have all but given up, and who can't quite resonate with the department store invitation to reinvention. How, then shall we remain good stewards of what Christ has entrusted us to share?

We can be reminded from the Book of Job that the source of good stewardship is humility before God, and that the source of wholeness is submission to God's call and God's will. These acts of humility and submission do not happen apart from the firm belief that God holds our life secure and holds the secret to our wholeness and wellbeing. The church of Jesus Christ is founded on this belief, and we who have pledged ourselves to Christ's community thereby pledge our treasure, our talents, and the spiritual gifts bestowed upon us by the Spirit of God to its mission to spread the message of wholeness and of hope in the Lord Jesus Christ. What resources will this community have at its disposal to spread that message? What difference will this community make to the world around us? If we weren't here, if we failed to deploy our resources to Christ's message of the Kingdom, would anyone notice?

In the passage from the letter to the Hebrews that we heard this morning, the author spends a great deal of time exploring the meaning of Christ as high priest, an imperishable and perfect mediator who alone intercedes for us before the throne of God. That may sound like hopelessly old-fashioned language. But believe me, it resonates with this generation who understands perfectly well that the hope of reinvention and reformation and restoration lies not with the culture or with the marketplace, but with a community that represents invisible, enduring values. It is in that sense that we are stewards of wholeness, caretakers of a message that cannot go forth unless the children of God commit themselves to its fulfillment. Will we go forth together as Christ's body and blood for the world? Do we have a story to tell that our world is clamoring to hear? Can you hear their voices crying out for healing and wholeness? Do you realize how important this community is for those who seek what they have not been able to find in

the world's competitive values that exclude the poor and the marginalized? May we have the courage to ask our world the question Jesus asked Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" The answer will demand our full energy as stewards of wholeness.



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