

As we draw near to the season of Lent this passage turns us towards Jerusalem and the events of the passion.

Here is contrasted the blindness of the Disciples who have been at the feet of Jesus who really should know better, and the faith of a blind man who can not see physically, but sees spiritually. There is also the contrast between those who can see physically, especially the religious leaders of the day who are supposedly in tune with what God is on about, but do not see Jesus as he really is, and the blind man is able to see that Jesus is who he really is.

Jesus has just explained to them what is going to happen to him, but the disciples are so caught up in where they are that they are not listening to him and the implications that this information will have for them and of course for Jesus. They are caught up in the excitement of all that is going on around them. Everything seems to be going well for them, they don't want to hear about horrible things that may happen to Jesus. They only want to focus on the good things, concentrate on the exciting thing, concentrate on the things they feel that they can cope with.

This attitude is extrapolated to the caravan of people moving through Jericho on the way to Jerusalem. They think they are going to sort out the authorities in Jerusalem, they don't need to be distracted by this beggar on the side of the road. However, in doing this they are engaging in the exact same sort of dismissive ness that the religious leaders were engaged in with these sorts of people and were one of the main mission foci for Jesus. In a short space of time the disciples have been distracted from the main focus of what Jesus is on about, and are focused on their own agendas, and to heck with anyone who gets in their way.

It cuts to the heart of the issue that is quite pertinent today. Those of us who have nice comfortable lives are less likely to see our need for Jesus, than those who are deprived or disenfranchised from the society around them.

We in the church are always in danger of being comfortable in our lives, and forgetting the needs of the people around us. We like to have our religion nice and comfortable and we really don't want to be inconvenienced or challenged by others who are different from us.

The reality is, though, the way of the cross is not comfortable. It is a difficult place to go. The way of the cross leads us past people such as the blind beggar on the side of the road. We have to stop and acknowledge that there are people less fortunate than us, who are not enjoying the same level of comfort that we are. We might feel uncomfortable with that, not know how to respond. Jesus gives us the answer. We simply stand and confront the issue, and ask what it is that they need us to do for them, and respond to the need compassionately and sensitively.

However, for us to even do that, we have to be like Jesus, aware of the call of the cross and the implications for following the lead of God in that direction and being willing to go the way of the cross.

This passage is a real warning to us in the church as to where our priorities lie. Do they lie with our own agenda, or with God's agenda? The disciples are a warning to us that if they can get caught up in their own agenda, so can we. The test for us if we are on God's agenda or our agenda is the uncomfortability test.

Are we happy with our lot, a bit aware of what is going on around us but not really wanting to get engaged, because that might mean we have to do something different. If that is where we are at then we are where the disciples are at in the Gospel today. We need to look around us and see beyond ourselves, and when we do that we will find that there are people crying out to us for aid and assistance, because unlike us, they who have nothing are fully aware of what Jesus can do for them, and that is the saddest irony of all.

This will always be a challenge for us as a church here in Gordon. However, if we lose sight of what we are meant to be on about, and only concentrate on what we have always done, and / or what feels comfortable for us then we are in real danger of becoming an irrelevant church. We might always be a comfortable church to belong to, but that is alright because it means we are on the edge with our ministry, and that we are reaching beyond our comfort zone.

The way of the cross is about going beyond what is comfortable and what is nice. It is about engaging meaningfully with people, not keeping them at arms length. It is about getting and getting mucky and dirty with the people in their lives, even the complicated ones, but above all it is about remembering to look on the world with the eyes of Christ. That is to look on the world with the eyes of compassion, and concern, and willing to go beyond where we are at. As we enter into Lent we would do well to remember that, and respond to its challenge.