

[May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be **acceptable** in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.]

Episcopalians are weird. I was raised as one, so I know, this stuff can be weird. I'm a seminary student. I chose the weird in droves.

We have our generalized quirks. We generally know when we stand and sit, but I know Zoom church took some of that out of me. I've never had to consciously ask for everyone to sit. [so it's a real honor to have you be my first. Thank you.]

But there are our individual expressions of what Episcopalianism means. For some, it is a home, maybe one with a dynamic relationship, one that expands and contrasts over the years. For others, this church may be a temporary refuge, an occasional glimpse into a curious group of people who seem nice enough at coffee hour.

While our reasons for being here are diverse, what I find so important is that many of you have eagerly taught someone about something you feel a unique attachment to in this space. The stories of this space. The stories of your life. The stories of your faith.

No matter how we come to this space, we eagerly seek God in our peculiarities.

In today's reading, Jesus walks as ever in his ministry, moving with the disciples to Jericho. Weariness, frustration, not least with the disciples who, in the last few months of readings, have behaved especially poorly. They keep failing to grasp some really essential points. The first will be last, and the last will be first. Do you get it yet? It's a paradigm shift. It can't be this hard. I'm looking at you, John.

But in today's reading, they don't have anything to misunderstand. Jesus stops. He hears a man cry to him, addressing him, and he stops.

This is the last act of Jesus before going to Jerusalem. It is an act of healing. All the suffering to come is preceded by the ministry performed by Jesus for a man who only asked to be made to see.

He came to Jesus, and he saw.

A pleasant reassurance.

Jesus stops and heals, knowing suffering and fear will mark the next 8 days.

Christ is not a secular leader who enjoys our submission. Instead, Christ seeks us as we seek Christ, turning when we call and asking us what we need. Bartimaeus asks for sight, and it is given to him. “Son of David,” our Messiah, in his purpose to Jerusalem, stops. Not for vanity, not for reward. Christ stops because Christ was called to, and he listened.

And we today, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, ask for our wholeness.

We ask for reconciliation. We ask for healing.

But as a church, we can become caught in our uniqueness. We ask ourselves what separates us, and sometimes that comes across as us asking why we are better.

But we turn to the company of Job in these questions. It is Job’s hubris that sends him to despair: “Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. [...] therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

God describes Godself in light and goodness. God is power and might. God restores us.

But that doesn’t make this passage easy. That doesn’t make this passage less difficult. God restores twice what God took away. Does that mean that God sees us as disposable? Can our pain be imposed for some bet that God chooses to participate in?

I remember sitting in Confirmation classes at 13, being asked to talk about our favorite heretics, and maybe it is telling to think back on how excited I was then. Because I come to this text, and sometimes I am put off by Job’s earthly reward. His stuff was taken, so he got it back. He got more. Did Job live those 140 years in opulence? If so, I’d see this story as an even deeper tragedy, but he didn’t. That is not his reward.

This is not a story of worldly restoration. This is not making amends after a fight, nor is it the kind of self-analysis we use to honestly come to terms with our actions. This is not the renewal of the Episcopal Church. All of that is restoration, but that is not this story.

Job experienced God. The wicked may prosper, the good may suffer, but Job experienced God at the depths of his despair. And the questioning and wrong answers aren't the end. Instead, God blesses his days, and Job enters a new beginning, a new beginning from which Job is renewed.

We are not wrong to question. We are not wrong to ask. But we bring our uncertainty to God, and we ask for the love we know we will receive, but we are trembling, as dust and ash, knowing we will be healed for that is faith. But God does not love us for our trembling. God loves us for our faith.

Jesus heals Bartimaeus in his faith. Even if the disciples cannot grasp what Christ says, in a week, Christ will die for all our sins. God's love expands through God's creation, alive in the love of God.

What other explanation could there be for a community like this? A community that professes love and acts on that love over and over, through fellowship and hospitality, and that love will only grow as we continually heal and ask for our health.

Together, we profess our faith to our creator and sustainer, our redemption and our hope. In all our questions and uncertainties, call out in faith.

**AMEN.**