

February 2, 2020

*“Super Bowl Thoughts”*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Mark 10:46-52; Matthew 6:31-33

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Hmmm. I'm not feeling quite right today. Like there's something wrong, something missing. Can anyone guess what it is? Right – it's because the Patriots aren't in the Super Bowl! I mean, what's Super Bowl Sunday without Tom Brady and the Pats! I'm afraid we've been too spoiled here in New England. So now I have to decide – who am I going to root for tonight? Well, I do like Jimmy Garoppolo. He used to be a Patriot. And who doesn't like Patrick Mahomes? He's a Christian and recently tweeted to his fans, “God is amazing!” In fact, as you probably know, there are a number of football stars who are men of faith. And one of the most devout is the man who will be the national radio announcer for tonight's game – former NFL quarterback, and Super Bowl champion, and Hall of Famer, Kurt Warner.

But before I get into more detail about Kurt, let's start with today's first scripture lesson. Jesus and his disciples came to Jericho. It's the very first sentence. “They came to Jericho.” Now you would expect that St. Mark is going to tell us about something big that happened there. You see, Jericho is considered to be one of the world's oldest cities, so you can just imagine the history, tradition and character of the city. It was on a trade route with lots of commerce, which made it a city of wealth. In fact King Herod the Great made it his winter residence. So, as you might think, Jericho was a happening spot. However, according to Mark, no sooner does Jesus get into Jericho, but in the very next sentence, Jesus and his disciples are leaving Jericho. Why? No reason is given, but that's when the excitement begins.

A large crowd follows him out of the city And, as Jesus and the crowd walk down the road, they come across Bartimaeus. Who, we're told, was just sitting there. A blind man sitting at the side of the road, begging. And I'll tell you what strikes me about Bartimaeus. It's not that he's blind, or that he's a beggar. What strikes me about Bartimaeus is that he is just sitting by the side of the road, doing nothing. Stuck in his ways, stuck in his sorrows, depressed, hopeless. The only thing he can see is himself – his circumstances. You see, he is not only blind to the world around him, but he's also blind to any new possibilities for his life. And I'm sure that over time, layers upon layers of disappointment, fear, doubt, resentment, have built up within him until he is covered in not only a physical darkness, but a spiritual darkness as well. And so he just sits by the side of the road. Even the crowds have become somewhat intolerant of him and his ways, and they sternly tell him to be quiet as Jesus passes by him on the road. Yes, there's Bartimaeus.

And isn't there sometimes a little bit of Bartimaeus in all of us? When we sit back and wish things were different. When we wish our lives had more purpose, our jobs were more fulfilling, our marriage stronger, our health better, our children or grandchildren more attentive, our problems and issues and difficulties resolved. And we sit there because we too are blind. We can't see that the future holds anything better for us. We look only at our circumstances, and soon layers of fear, doubt and resentment build, and we don't trust that God loves or cares for us. So there we are, stuck, just sitting by the side of the road – like Bartimaeus.

Until... until Jesus Christ comes near. And Bartimaeus hears the crowds following Jesus. He hears them talk about all the wonderful things Jesus has done. And he wonders - might there be something about following this man that could change things for him, give him a future, maybe even make him see? And so Bartimaeus shouts out "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And sure enough, Jesus stops, and he calls Bartimaeus to come over. And this blind beggar quickly gets up and goes right to Jesus. Somehow, Bartimaeus, even in his blindness, is able to see the "light of the world." Now did you also note, the scripture tells us Bartimaeus throws off his cloak. In Jesus' time, most people wore two garments – an inner tunic and an outer cloak. And often times they didn't wear a loincloth under their inner tunic. And an educated guess would tell us that Bartimaeus couldn't afford either a loincloth or inner tunic. His cloak was probably the only possession he owned. And when he went running to Jesus, he threw off the cloak - leaving it by the side of the road. And I could imagine him standing there before Jesus naked. Just as he was. Vulnerable, open, fully revealed, as the day he was born. With Jesus in his sight, Bartimaeus is able to shed all those layers that kept him in his darkness. He throws off his fears and doubts and resentments. And he stands there, ready to be changed by his new found faith and trust in God. And Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" And Bartimaeus says, "I want to see again." And Jesus tells him, "Go, your faith has made you well." Your faith has made you well.<sup>1</sup>

And now, here we are two thousand years later, wondering if this story holds any significance for us today. Well, let me assure you it does. On this Super Bowl Sunday, 2020, let's go back to Kurt Warner. His story is one of the NFL's rags to riches stories, from nothing to "all this and more," like we heard in our second scripture. Kurt met his wife, Brenda, when she was a divorced mother of two small children, one who is blind and brain-damaged. After college, Kurt had hoped to play in the NFL, but

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<sup>1</sup> Credit for sermon thoughts to Rev. Grace Imathieu

was cut by the Green Bay Packers before the season even began. So he took a job stocking shelves at a grocery store at night for \$5.50 an hour. He and Brenda lived on food stamps for awhile, and they went through some very dark times, including when Brenda parents were both killed in a tornado. But instead of being bitter or depressed, sitting on the side of the road, Kurt turned more and more to his faith. And that made all the difference. Mark Kriegal from Fox Sports writes, “Warner had to know what the rest of us understand too well. Grocery stock boys don't make it to the NFL or go on to become Most Valuable Players or win the Super Bowl. For Warner to have considered his (circumstances) in rational terms might well have killed his hope. But, then, Warner isn't playing the odds. He's working on faith. He told us. ‘It's the power of Jesus Christ. I walk by faith and not by sight. I walk according to what I believe, and what I believe the power of God is, as opposed to what the world tells me, or what circumstances appear to be.’” So let's watch a short video.

<https://www1.cbn.com/700club/kurt-and-brenda-warner-putting-first-things-first>

Did you hear what he said – I was no longer looking at me. I began looking at what God wanted for me. And he came to the conclusion – it's all about Jesus. Yes it is! We are not meant to let the circumstances of our lives cause us to sit by the side of the road and watch Jesus pass us by. We are meant to boldly follow him and trust him. We heard Jesus put it as directly as he could today, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body.” And our common sense may want to scream out loud and say, “That's absurd, I must consider how I'm going to live.” Jesus says we must not! And so we have to be on guard to think that his statement is made without regard or understanding of our circumstances. Jesus Christ knows our circumstances better than we do!<sup>2</sup> Jesus Christ knows our circumstances much better than we do. That's why our faith in him is so important, and why only our faith can make us well. And then we can rely on his promise we heard today, "All this and more will be given to you." Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> My Utmost For His Highest, Oswald Chambers