

**“Seeing Double: Unclean and Highly Prized” based on Job 42:1-6, Mark 10:46-52**  
**Delivered by Pastor Drew Mangione on October 24, 2021, at Shelby Presbyterian Church**

In our reading from Job today, the last two lines are a little bit strange. So, strange indeed that they are some of the more hotly contested lines in scripture. The New Revised Standard Version translation reads, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; Therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

The book of Job is one of the Old Testament’s four books that are exclusively wisdom, and by this, I mean that these are writings about God and about personal virtue. They are not dependent on the story being told, or any historical accuracy, though it may be so. Instead, the point of these books is to lead us into wisdom through the dialogue and the sayings. The story of Job is about how we make sense of suffering. How we make sense of God when bad things happen to good people.

Job is held up as the most righteous person there is and yet, he endures a series of tragedies, which start with a bet of sorts, between God and Satan, the adversary. As an aside here, I want to note that Satan’s bet challenged the religious structures of the people of Israel. In all the countries around them, the gods they served needed to be cared for by the people. It was a transactional relationship of reward and punishment. You take care of the gods, and they would take care of you. But Israel’s God worked the other way around. Satan thinks Job is only good to God because God is good to him.

So, when this happens, Job is comforted by his friends, and I use the term loosely here. While they sit with him for a little while, eventually they try to explain to Job the theology of all he is going through. They see his suffering & they blame him, blame the victim, for his own suffering. They give every reason for why they think Job might deserve his pain. They set up a false concept that there are three things in question: Job’s goodness, God’s goodness, and God’s justice. Rather than praying for Job, or helping Job, or even praying for themselves, they rely on their own vision for how God works. They are expert religious people.

Eventually, Job rejects their reasoning, but he is still affected by what they have said to him. So, he demands that God gives him a trial. He demands that God gives him an explanation. God answers his prayer, and God asks Job asks a simple question: *‘Were you there when I created everything?’* Of course, Job was not there, and God shows Job that he is very small in the grand scheme of things, yet he is still beloved and seen by God. This is an extremely brief summary of the 41 previous chapters, but it leads us to today’s reading.

Job recognizes that God is sovereign over all things, and humbly says he did not understand. But Job does not promise to just be silent. Job promises to continue to pray. Notice his words: ‘Hear and I will speak. I will question you, and you declare to me.’ He says this to God. These are the same words that God had first said to Job from the whirlwind, when God reveals to Job that prayer is an open line of communication. Job then says, ‘I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.’

Job had known of God, and heard about God, and now had spoken directly with God in the whirlwind, and while, there is no indication of God appearing to Job, now Job says his 'eye sees.' And then it comes the line that is contested – Job despises himself and repents.

It's contested because the word 'himself' is not actually in the text, and 'repent' here isn't the usual word used for repent, '*shuv*,' which means 'to turn around.' It is a word that in other parts of Job is translated as 'comfort.' So, the verse is unclear what it is that Job despises, and I think what he despises is that he challenged God in the first place. And I think he is comforted by 'dust and ashes,' because he finds comfort in his nothingness and insignificance before an Almighty God, who nonetheless sees him and wants to hear from him.

The wisdom we can glean from this is the same regardless of translation, because it is simply that no matter how righteous we may be, we can still misunderstand God. We put God in our own box, overvaluing ourselves and our own wisdom, yet regardless, in spite of this, and nonetheless, to God we are 'highly prized.'

It is in our human nature to think that we can explain everything around us. I love the scientific method. I love science and I love discovery. It is incredible that we have discovered so much about God's creation and how it works. However, no matter how much you or I might grasp how things happen, through our study of the who, what, where and when of this world, the truth is that the '*why*' ultimately belongs to God alone. That is hard for us to take comfort in. Job does it, but I don't expect us to be able to so easily. We judge ourselves. We judge others. We judge God, because we think we can see the full picture. We blame ourselves, or we blame others, or we blame God for our suffering, when things go awry in life.

Like Job's friends did to Job, the religious leaders in our gospel message today judge the blind man. It's not explicit, like it is in the healing of the blind man from the gospel of John, but still, if we look closely at Mark's writing in context, we can see this reality. Except that in Mark, this behavior is not revealed through the Pharisees. It is the crowd, even the disciples themselves, who are trying to exclude others, and trying to inflate their own importance over others in need. If you recall, the disciples have been arguing, about who is the greatest, and what's more they have questioned the worthiness of others from outside their group.

And so, when they are leaving Jericho on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover, they hear a man crying out, 'Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me!' Here is a blind man in desperate need crying out to Jesus for mercy just as Job did, and like Job's friends, the disciples don't ask Jesus what he wants. Instead, they and the crowd rebuke the man, like he is a demon – it's the same word as when Jesus rebukes the demons. And they try to keep him silent, but he cries out even louder: 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

It is Jesus who hears the man, and who demands that the disciples address him, just as it was God who heard Job, when Job was the only one in the story who stopped to pray. The friends didn't. They thought they knew everything without prayer. And just as God heard Job and responded, Jesus who is the embodiment of Israel's God, hears the man who cries out in

humility, the man who recognized who Jesus is. Then Jesus asks this man the same question he asked James and John, 'What do you want me to do?'

Unlike James and John, who called Jesus just 'teacher,' the blind man says, 'My Great Rabbi.' And he does so after he has already thrown off the only thing of value he likely has – his cloa. He rushes to the sound of Jesus's voice, coming to him in a whirlwind. It is a voice he hears coming from out of the crowd travelling with Jesus. And he asks to regain his sight, literally, that he might look up and see. And Jesus tells him to leave his begging station. Then, just as God recognized Job's faithfulness, Jesus tells the man it is his faith that healed him.

Immediately, he joins Jesus on the way, on the way to Jerusalem, on the way to the cross. This blind man is first seen as 'unclean,' unworthy of taking up Jesus's time. Then like Job he comes to realize that he is 'highly prized' by Jesus, and he follows him.

I've intentionally not said the blind beggar's name yet. I've buried the lede here. But now I want to show you the depth of Mark's story. You see, Mark was not a native Greek speaker. Mark likely spoke Aramaic. Probably, Greek was his third language, since Mark is a Latin name. And so, when Mark is writing this gospel, he wants to point out something that the other gospel writers don't feel inclined to point out – the meaning of Bartimaeus.

He sees something in that name that gives him, and us, greater insight into this story. Mark says he is, 'Son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus,' mixing up Greek and Aramaic in this verse. You see, in Greek, Timaeus means 'highly prized,' but in Hebrew and Aramaic, 'Timah' means unclean, and 'Bar' as a prefix, means 'Son.' And so, what we have is Mark saying this man is 'Son of the Highly Prized, Son of the Unclean.'

The blind beggar in our story today is seen in two different ways in this story. He is seen both as that 'son of the unclean,' and so, he is unworthy of God's love and attention, of Jesus's time. Yet, he is also 'son of the highly prized,' one whom Jesus sees and listens to. In the judgement of the disciples and likely the religious leaders also, Bartimaeus is unclean, and not worthy of being close to God. That is why he is left on the outside of the city, on the margins, left to beg just to survive, to live another day. Like Job's friends, some may think it's his fault, and who knows, even Bartimaeus, just as Job did at one point, may have wondered the same.

But Jesus reveals that this man whom others judge as unclean, is in fact highly prized. My sisters and brothers in Christ, I am here to tell you that this is also true for you. You are highly prized, even when you may feel unclean or unworthy of God. You are highly prized, even when others might judge you unworthy too. You are highly prized, even when you are struggling in life, just the same as when you are doing well in life, when then also, you again are highly prized.

We may be children of uncleanness, being human and falling short of the glory of God, but that is why the Father sent the Son, why God bore our human flesh, our limits, to live as you and I live, to take on the powers of this world, sin and death, and die for us, conquering those very powers, rising again for you and me. This is how valuable we are to God, for by this, the Holy Spirit lives in us and among us. God did not need to create you or me, since God created all

things and could have destroyed us and started over. God is eternal, all-powerful and is in community, Father, Son and Spirit, sovereign and bound by self-giving love. This Triune God chose you, created you, and you are highly prized.

Like Job's friends, we may try to fit God into a box that we can explain in our terms, but this is futile, when what God wants is to be seen by us, to be God with us, to be personal to us. Just as Job saw God and recognized his right to talk to, and even question God, and just as Bartimaeus's eyes were opened, so he looked up and saw Jesus.

When we are stuck thinking of ourselves as unworthy of God or struggling to recognize when God is at work in our lives, our calling is to be like Bartimaeus, who is the unclean son, but who also cries out to be seen and heard and gives up everything he has when he hears Jesus's voice, and he follows Jesus to the cross, knowing that he is highly prized.

This is not just some esoteric concept meant for a limited few to understand. This is a truth that I need to remind myself of on a daily basis, and I am a pastor. You trust me to be in your pulpit. Yet, just yesterday, I found myself bound by the judgements of others, and I snapped at someone, losing my temper a little bit. It didn't matter if my words were just and righteous. It didn't matter if they were said in an attempt to help someone. I was enflamed by my feeling like my family and my faith, were being judged unworthy.

But any and all righteousness I had on my side was lost when I acted as the world acts, forgetting God's love for me. I forgot that in good times and bad, I am highly prized by our God. I forgot that God's opinion of me, not the person I snapped at, is what matters.

Friends, we all make mistakes. But I want you to see that you are highly prized, because you are – that's it, just the way you are, you are highly prized. You are here in this church to hear Jesus's words because he has called you. You're here maybe because like the blind man, you feel judged or judge yourself for something in your life. Still, you are in church, calling out to Jesus, for who he truly is, maybe even using church language you don't fully understand.

Beloved of God, cry out to Jesus. Don't let anyone silence you in pursuit of him. Pray and seek him in the scriptures where he is revealed to you, because what the world says is unclean, what the world may say is unworthy, is in fact, both beloved and highly prized by God. Amen.