

FROM THE MANSE

Dear Friends,

Many of you will be familiar with the saying 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again'.

Perhaps you heard these words when you were young and attempting to ride a bike without stabilisers, or possibly it was when you were learning to swim and you went under the water a few times and were tempted to give up, or maybe it was when you were memorising your tables – you remember them!

Bartimaeus, about whom we have just read, was blind and because he was blind, he could not work. Therefore he had to beg in order to get money to buy food. His was an altogether miserable existence but one day he heard that Jesus was in the vicinity and he decided to call on him. At first it was only those around him who heard Bartimaeus and angrily they told him to be quiet because they wanted to hear what Jesus was saying, but this made Bartimaeus shout even more loudly and, so desperate was he to escape from his world of darkness, that he continued to shout until Jesus finally heard him.

To persevere when our objective is good is a commendable thing yet as we see in Bartimaeus it requires courage and a resolute spirit. What if Nelson Mandela had stopped resisting his government's apartheid after 27 years in prison? And what about Vincent Van Gogh? His work was continually deemed worthless during his lifetime. How tempting it must have been for him to give up but thankfully, he didn't.

Bartimaeus had heard about Jesus; the things he had done, the words he had spoken, the lives he had changed and deep down he knew that Jesus was the one who could help him not only physically by restoring his sight, but spiritually, setting him free from sin, helping him to have peace with God and giving him new life.

He persevered and he did so because he knew this might be the only opportunity to meet with Jesus and **nothing** was going to get in his way. Isn't there something here for us to think about? So often an opportunity arises for us to do or say something but we let other matters hold us back, and then the opportunity is lost, and how much regret we can have when that happens.

Or, let's be honest, there can be times when we set ourselves a goal only to be surrounded by people who inadvertently tell us to 'get real', in other words that we will not succeed. I recall a friend who showed me an old outbuilding that he was going to restore and convert into a house. He saw the look of incredulity on my face but said he would succeed and he did!

The celebrated churchman, Norman Macleod, was born in 1812 in Campbeltown (I've heard of it!) His first charge was Louden in Ayrshire and later he became minister of the Barony Church in Glasgow. He lived through difficult and challenging times including the disruption of 1843 when many ministers - among them Christopher Greig of this parish – and countless numbers of congregations broke away from the established church of Scotland.

Many who were left held their hands up in despair and some lost heart but not Norman MacLeod. He firmly placed his trust in God and called on others to do the same. His hymn 'Courage brother, do not stumble' continues to be a source of encouragement to many ;

'Courage, brother! Do not stumble, Though thy path be dark as night; There's a star to guide the humble; Trust in God and do the right. Let the road be rough and dreary, and its end far out of sight, Foot it bravely; strong or weary, Trust in God, and do the right'.

For Bartimaeus the path was as 'dark as night' but then he encountered Jesus and in his final miracle before the crucifixion, Jesus gave Bartimaeus his sight.....the darkness gave way to the light.....and what are we told? He did not selfishly go on his way when his need was met. Bartimaeus followed Jesus!

It was Professor William Barclay who said 'Christianity begins with a personal reaction to Jesus, a reaction of love, feeling that here is the one person who can meet our need. Even if we are never able to think things out theologically, that response of the human heart is enough'.

And that we see in Bartimaeus. He called Jesus, 'Son of David'. That was partially true but not the whole truth but that didn't matter. Bartimaeus had faith and that was enough for Jesus.

My friends, we do not need to be perfect or 'sorted' in our faith to receive from God. We do not need to reach a certain degree of holiness or dedication before God will listen to us or meet us where we are. Faith, even a grain of faith, is enough.....

'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again'. What a lesson we have to learn from Bartimaeus and those like him, who despite hindrances persevered, and in persevering were not left disappointed.

Every blessing,

Your Friend and Minister,

Gary J McIntyre