

Sermon: Sunday 28 October 2018 – 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
(Year B) St John the Evangelist Toorak
Job 42:1-6, 10-17; Psalm 34:1-8; Hebrews 7:21-28; Mark 10: 46-52

Have you ever been told to shut up?

Have you ever told yourself to shut up before you've opened your mouth?
Because you didn't feel you could speak into that company or because you
assumed no one would want to hear what you wanted to say?

There are times when we wish that people wouldn't speak.

I know I've felt like rolling my eyes at when a 'question' at a public lecture
turns into that person's personal soapbox moment.

When should we speak?

When should we be silent?

When should we encourage others to speak?

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

This is the cry of the blind man near Jericho. In Mark's Gospel he is named
Bartimaeus. He is begging because he is blind and he hears the commotion
that is Jesus going past. He can discern that it is the Jesus that everyone has
been talking about. He knows who Jesus is and he has faith that Jesus can
return his sight. So Bartimaeus calls out, and those around him tell him to be
quiet.

It's like the people in the crowd have completely forgotten that Jesus is a
healer as well as a teacher. So far in Mark's Gospel Jesus has healed:
the sick and possessed,
lepers,
a paralytic,
a man with a withered hand,
a woman of her twelve years of bleeding,
Jairus' young daughter,
caused the deaf to hear and the blind to see.

Surely, that aspect of Jesus' ministry in the region would have made it into the
stories.

Why shouldn't a blind man call on Jesus for mercy?

People have been asking Jesus all sorts of questions in our recent Gospel readings:

James and John asked to sit alongside Jesus in his glory.

The rich man asked how to inherit eternal life.

Bartimaeus calls on Jesus, the Son of the David, the man of God, for mercy.

And he was told to be quiet.

Bartimaeus was not deterred. He called on Jesus more loudly and Jesus hears him. He hears and summons Bartimaeus to him.

Bartimaeus springs up and goes to Jesus and makes his explicit request.

In response to healing, rather than going on his way as Jesus says, Bartimaeus joins those who follow Jesus.

Jesus listens to those others would ignore. Jesus listens to those others command to be silent.

Who are the voiceless in our communities?

Historically and in the present there are many. It's why we have Royal Commissions, public enquiries and advocates, so that those who were unable to speak can have a voice.

People have a deep need to be heard.

In South Africa after apartheid, the work of the Truth and Reconciliation commission gave voice to experiences previously unacknowledged.

Our own indigenous sisters and brothers continue to find ways to tell their history, their experiences that coincide with the history of European settlement in Australia that are still largely unheard.

The calls to extend the Royal Commission into the financial services sector because so many people have not had the opportunity to share their story demonstrates that deep human need to be heard.

Medical professionals caring for the vulnerable in immigration detention need to be able to speak of what they know of the suffering, otherwise injustice and inhumanity will continue and further harm to our fellow human beings will be done.

Being heard matters.

A diversity of voices will inevitably provide a broader perspective.

That's why there are concerted efforts in various fields to ensure that representative voices are present, at the very least along lines of gender, and also to better reflect the composition of our society.

There are voices that need to be heard, that have been told to be quiet.

Determination is worth it.

In the case of Bartimaeus, persistence was rewarded with mercy. For us it is a reminder that Jesus will hear us when we call on him, even in the midst of all that crowds around us.

We may not always feel like Jesus and God hear us, but we are still encouraged to persist.

Over the past few weeks we have been following the story of Job, and today we come to the end of that story. After all the heartbreak and suffering that Job has experienced, he has his direct audience with The Lord. Today's reading is Job's response after God has spoken to him out of the whirlwind.

Even in the full knowledge that all things are possible with God, and that God's full extent is beyond our human understanding, God hears Job.

God hears us.

God sent Jesus into the world to speak and to hear.
And as Christians, we continue to call on God through Jesus Christ.
God hears the voiceless, and we should try to hear them too.

It can be overwhelming and challenging, but it is still worthwhile.

We as the Church, gathered Christians, are Christ's Body on earth. That includes ears with which to hear, eyes with which to see, hearts with which to feel, hands with which to act and mouths with which to speak.

Jesus listened and responded to the marginalised, outcast and lost, and I know it is difficult, but we are called to do likewise.

We know that God hears the voiceless and we pray they will know God's comfort and presence, and we pray that we might have the strength to hear them too, to shout them if needed, and to respond with mercy just as Jesus did,

It is a challenge.

It can be daunting.

We are not in it alone, and we need to be in it for the long haul.

When should we speak?

When should we shout?

Elizabeth Murray