

We get a lot from our parents in life. We inherit our physical traits, we are given our names, we pick up all kinds of messages, both stated and unstated, and all these factors blend together with the unique gifts from God we are given and our own life experiences that shape us into the people we are.

The results from this blend, of course, can sometimes be very good and sometimes very difficult. Both the strengths that carry us through life and weaknesses that plague us usually share their roots in our early years, and we have a prime example this morning in the main character from our Gospel reading; Bartimaeus

First of all, names worked a bit differently in the ancient world. When our character was introduced, Mark called him Bartimaeus, Son of Timaeus. If you look a bit more closely, you'll see that the son's name is the same as the father's except that "Bar" is prefixed to it. "Bar" means "son of" so Bartimaeus simply means "son of Timaeus." It was the ancient world's way of saying "Jr."

Additionally, names often carried significant meaning in the ancient world, most important for us being that the name "Jesus" actually means, "the Lord saves." Timaeus, as a word, means "unclean" a word with very negative connotations in ancient Israel. So we are introduced to our character this morning by being told that his name means "son of an unclean man."

Do you suppose for a second that he could've been raised with that cloud over his head without it having a very negative impact on his view of himself and his chances for a good and happy life? He was a blind beggar, but he had not always been blind because when he spoke with Jesus he said that he wanted to see again. Regardless, it's not hard to see how life had taken the wind out of Bartimaeus' sails. But not entirely, there was more to this soul than being the son of an unclean man.

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" he shouted from the roadside. Everyone told him to be quiet, which only inspired him to shout more loudly "Son of David, have mercy on me!" There was chutzpah in this man. An assertive streak, a stubborn streak. Perhaps that also came from his father, or maybe his mother, or maybe life as a blind man taught him that you have to compensate by using what you've got, and he obviously had no disability with his voice, because Jesus not only heard him, but sent for him and asked him the most personal question he asked anyone in his ministry: "Bartimaeus, what do you want me to do for you?" To which this assertive son of an unclean man said, "Rabbi let me see again." And how did Jesus respond? "Go, your faith has made you well", and Bartimaeus regained his sight and immediately began following Jesus.

We are all a lot like Bartimaeus, we have all been shaped sometimes for good and sometimes for ill, by forces in our early lives over which we had no control, but echoes of which effect us all our lives. But when those forces are limiting us, there is another force greater still that can move us beyond whatever is limiting us: the power of God that comes to us through faith

Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well," but I would restate it a bit more fully this way: Faith is the channel, the conduit, which gives the transforming power of God the line into us in order to flood us with the power to overcome, the power to endure, the power to hope, the power to be well.

And yes, Bartimaeus was given his sight back, but Jesus didn't promise that everyone would recover from whatever is plaguing them, he promised that by faith we can be made well. Sometimes that means we are given the grace of recovery, sometimes that means we are given the grace to endure, eventually, it means entering eternity where all are well in the presence of God.

As the son of Bob and Joyce Moroney, I share many strengths and weaknesses with the parents who brought me into this world and raised me. I'll leave for you to figure most of them out for yourself, but I do want to share two of the positive ones that have made all the difference in my life and which got me feeling a certain camaraderie with Bartimaeus, two phrases instilled in me very young. "Keep the faith" and "never give up."

"Keep the faith," not only because I was raised in a religious home, but because that is how my father often signs himself at the end of a card or letter: "Keep the faith, Love Dad." A small thing, but it made a big impression. Faith in Christ has been the foundation of my life.

"Never give up" because we Moroney children were taught that if you want to claw your way up from the Irish peasantry you have to keep on improving yourself. That's the kind of dogged determination instilled in me quite young that kept me working at my education until 12 days ago, I ascended a platform and was conferred with a PhD.

Thank you Lord, thank you Mom and Dad. I'll never give up. I'll keep the faith. It doesn't mean any of it has been easy, but it does mean that it has been worth it.

So, whatever is going on inside of or around you this morning, whatever messages are echoing in your mind, coming to you from the distant past; know that by faith you can be well. Faith in the one who saves, faith which opens the path for God's transforming power to make the difference in your outlook and in your life.

So, keep the faith, and never give up. Amen.