

Mark 10: 46-52
Creekside COB
October 15, 2006

“Minding Your Afters”

When I was a lad, my parents used a variety of expressions designed to get their point across. One in particular I heard far more than others. I heard it on the way to church. I heard it before our family visited relatives or attended a special event. I heard before I left the house to hang out with my friends. The expression was especially emphatic if I was hanging out with the Pickens brothers.

The expression was, “Mind your P’s and Q’s.” I had no clue what it meant when I first heard it. To my knowledge, I didn’t have any P’s and Q’s to mind. If I had to mind two letters of the alphabet, couldn’t I mind my T’s and V’s instead?

As an adult I learned the possible origins of this old English idiom. P’s and Q’s may have originated in English pubs. The letters stood for “pints” and “quarts.” It was a reminder to keep tabs on your bar bill. It was also an expression used in seventeenth-century England meaning, “prime quality.” It can also be traced to print shops where young type-setters were told to be careful with lower case “p’s” and “q’s”, since a backward “p” looks like a “q.” When my parent’s invoked “P’s and Q’s” it meant, “Stay out of trouble. Do what you are told. And no fights with your cousin, Larry.”

“P’s” and “Q’s” however weren’t the only things I had to mind. I also had to mind my manners. Later I was told, “Mind your own business.” It’s irksome to mind everything that needs to be minded. This morning I want you to be mindful of something that is more important than “P’s” and “Q’s” and manners, and your own business. A writer named Ken Krouse tells us what it is:

Mind your afters:

after Easter
after Christmas
after while
after work
after school
after the ball is over
after life
after death.

We invest so much time, energy, and thought preparing for longed-for moments. But after Christmas is over, and after the ball is over, after our work is over, after life, and after death, THEN WHAT? What happens “after” decisive events and routine experiences that shape our lives?

The healing story Mark tells is noteworthy, not only because of one man’s encounter with Jesus, but also because of what came after. This is the only story in Mark that gives the name of the person Jesus healed. His name was Bartimaeus. He was a blind beggar.

The disciples are walking from Jericho when they pass Bartimaeus sitting by the road. Bartimaeus asks, “Who’s coming?” “It’s Jesus,” someone says. Knowing it could be his last best chance for a life, Bartimaeus shouts, “Jesus, Son of David! Have mercy on me!”

No one likes it when someone in the crowd causes a scene. I remember sitting in front of a large, loud, obnoxious fan at a Notre Dame football game. He wouldn’t sit down. He blocked the view of people behind him. He hollered as loud as he could to a buddy in the next section. He screamed at the referees. He was politely asked to sit down and quiet down, but he kept at it. Finally, the stadium staff was notified and it took three ushers to haul the gentleman out of the stadium where he could holler all he wanted.

Bartimaeus was causing a scene. To appreciate what is going on in the text, let’s go back to last Sunday’s passage in Mark 10:32. Jesus gave the third prediction of his passion and death. The

words were still warm when James and John told Jesus, “Do whatever we ask of you.” “What do you want me to do for you?” When the Kingdom comes, they want box seats next to Jesus. They missed the meaning of discipleship BY A MILE.

A disciple is not just an admirer of Jesus or a believer in Jesus. A disciple is *one who follows*. A disciple follows the path set by the teacher. Jesus said, “Foxes have hole. Birds have nests. But the Son of Man has no place to lay his head,” which suggests that disciples of Jesus have no stopping places.

Hearing a commotion to the side of the road, Jesus calls Bartimaeus and asks the same question he asked James and John-- “What do you want me to do for you?” He replied, “Master, I want to see.” Mark wants us to see, too. There is a lot of irony here. Though Bartimaeus is blind, he sees Jesus in a way that those closest to him do not. Bartimaeus not only sees that Jesus is his hope. He sees that Jesus is the world’s hope.

Without Jesus saying his sins were forgiven-- without rubbing spit and mud in his eyes—without even laying a hand on him—Bartimaeus received his sight. But the story doesn’t is just beginning. Check out the 52nd verse: And immediately he received his sight *and followed him on the way*. The disciples had their sight but didn’t see. They followed in fits and starts.

With no hesitation, Bartimaeus saw and followed Jesus. If you had been given you sight, what would you do? I’d want to see everything I had missed. I would vacation in the mountains or on the beach—maybe take a Mediterranean cruise. Bartimaeus could have gone his own way, but he decided to follow Jesus’ way.

If Bartimaeus had shut up like the crowd wanted him to do, he would have spent the rest of his days by the road. He didn’t listen to people who told him to be grateful for what he had and to accept the hand he was dealt. He didn’t mind his “P’s” and “Q’s.” He minded his afters.

We think of examples of people who get second chances but don't mind their afters. An unhealthy lifestyle leads to a coronary and bypass surgery. The patient is fortunate to be alive but goes back to consuming a pack of cigarettes and a box of Twinkies a day.

Jesus has a parade of people at his door-- people like James and John, asking for something. "Make all of my hassles disappear. Take away my burdens. Fix my aches and pains. Do this and I'll be on my way." But if I'm not mistaken, when we come TO Jesus, we must go WITH Jesus. We do not mind our afters if we go our own way.

C. S. Lewis wrote a book called The Screwtape Letters. In it, Screwtape, the devil, gives his devil nephew advice on how to prevent people from becoming Christians. He explains:

The great thing is to prevent him from doing any-thing. As long as he does not convert it to action, it does not matter how much he thinks about his new repentance. Let the little brute wallow in it. Let him write a book about it; that is often an excellent way of sterilizing the seeds which the God plants in a human soul.

Let him do anything but act. No piety in his imagination and affections will harm us if we can keep it out of his will. As one of the humans said, "Active habits are strengthened by repetition, but passive ones are weakened. The more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and in the long run, the less he will be able to feel.

Your affectionate Uncle Screwtape.

(Note: this sermon is not transcribed in its entirety.)