

## **“Yes, Lord I believe...”**

*Sermon, 10/27/2024, the Rev. Rich Wilson*

The women of our Thursday Morning Bible Study finished Season 4 of The Chosen earlier this fall. I had tried to get into the series a couple of times, with no luck.

But when Kathie came home talking about The Chosen, I queued up the first season again, and Kathie and I binged 3 seasons in less than two weeks. We caught up with the class just before Season 4, Episode 7 – “The Last Public Sign.” That brings us to Bartimaeus’ healing in today’s Gospel.

We’re in Mark, chapter 10. As it turns out, the healing of Bartimaeus is also Jesus’ last public sign in Mark’s Gospel. But allow me to begin with Jesus’ healing and Last Public Sign, in The Chosen.

You know well the healing story from John’s Gospel in The Last Public Sign. It’s the story of the raising of Lazarus.

Lazarus and his sisters, live in the village of Bethany. The sisters send a message to Jesus that Lazarus, “the one whom you love,” is ill; and they want Jesus to come. Jesus stays “two days longer,” but somehow intuits that Lazarus has “fallen asleep,” and tells his disciples he is going there to “awaken him.”

The disciples don’t get it.

Jesus tells them “plainly – Lazarus is dead.”

As with most of the wonderful Gospel scenes in The Chosen, there’s a backstory, often a dramatization not really found in the Bible.

Remember the Bible story about doubting Thomas? The true Bible story about Thomas is that he is the Gospel doubter who must place his finger and hands in the wounds of the risen Jesus in order to believe. In The Chosen, Thomas is a lot more colorful, especially with his girlfriend/potential fiancé Ramah, a fictional biblical character. (Pause.)

Ramah will be run through with a sword and die – right in front of Jesus.

Thomas cannot understand why Jesus did not save her.

What does this have to do with the raising of Lazarus? Stay tuned...we'll come back to that.

Beside Thomas is another real Bible character, Little James, aka James the Lesser. In the Chosen, Little James has a disability, and everybody wonders why Jesus is healing everybody but Little James. Again, stay tuned, we'll come back to that.

In John's Gospel and the Chosen, Jesus finally arrives in Bethany. Mary, one of Lazarus' two sisters, runs out to greet Jesus more than six days after the sisters had messaged Jesus that Lazarus was ill:

“We sent word – why didn't you come?”

You know the rest of the story. Jesus orders his disciples to roll back the stone, prays to his Father, and orders Lazarus to come out of the tomb. The women take the burial wrappings off and Lazarus is raised.

But again, there's a backstory.

The Chosen stages Thomas the doubter collapsing in grief and anger after Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

Jesus did not heal Thomas' beloved Ramah when she was killed right in front of Him – and now He raises Lazarus from the dead?

Jesus embraces Thomas and tries to explain, but Thomas can only mumble:

“It’s too much, it’s too much...”

Jesus' disciples also commiserate about the pain Little James has been in his entire life; and the fact that Jesus has still not healed him. An earlier fight in Jerusalem has exacerbated his disability, and after the long walk to raise Lazarus, Little James can hardly stand up.

Now the Chosen zooms in on a late night exclusive conversation between Jesus and the risen Lazarus.

Lazarus asks the \$64 million question:

“Why me?”

Jesus responds directly: “It was not so much who as when...I’m out of time, Laz. This was the last public sign – as for the heartbroken, (Thomas and Little James), their (sisters and) brothers will have to care for (them) tonight.” (Pause.)

In my training to become a hospital chaplain we often did Theological Reflections. So one Monday evening Mary Alice, a young and idealistic Disciples of Christ Pastor, shared a wonderful sermon she had recently given...on the “Beatitudes.”

Her theme was simple and direct: be careful when you talk about a blessing or healing you have received. This was perfect advice for chaplains beginning a ministry to sick and dying people in the hospital –

where not every patient receives the blessing, healing, or answer to prayer they were hoping for.

Our supervisor, Fr. Charlie congratulated Mary Alice; but then told her that she'd never keep a job in most American churches by preaching to the congregation that they can't talk about their blessings and healings! After all, they earned them, right?

Back to our Chosen blessings and healings: why didn't Jesus heal Ramah and Little James?

I think the answer to that question actually comes earlier in the story about the raising of Lazarus. Remember when Jesus had just arrived in Bethany? Lazarus is still dead. Now Martha, Lazarus' other sister, is standing in front of Jesus.

Martha tells Jesus one more time that if He'd have been there her brother would not have died; and then Martha gives Jesus a textbook statement from our faith: "I know, Lazarus will rise in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus responds to Martha: (Pause) "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (Pause).

Do we believe this?

I know we do. And so will Martha, Thomas, and Little James. Martha says it for all of us this way: "Yes (Jesus) I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

And that's all it takes. Just one "Yes."

I wonder if we really understand what we're saying "Yes" to; but I believe with all my heart that any "Yes" is enough – because when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, He knows that at that precise moment, we are truly ready for something far beyond ourselves to believe in. And I think that is what the raising of Lazarus is about. Believing.

Ultimately it's the same question in today's Gospel for blind Bartimaeus. Jesus will perform a healing as His last public sign in Mark's Gospel. And afterwards Jesus will tell Bartimaeus:

"Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately (Bartimaeus) (will regain) his sight and (follow) (Jesus) on the way."

Bartimaeus will also be the last disciple called by Jesus in Mark's Gospel. (Pause)

Jesus continues to call us...with infinite patience...to believe and "come follow on the way." Our faith has made us well.

Yes, Lord, we believe.