Everybody loves a happy ending. We want the good to win and the evil to be punished. Like fairy tales, where everybody lives happily ever after. Unfortunately reality intrudes, sometimes rudely, like the bomb scares that happened last week in places all over the United States. On Saturday, there was a shooting in Pittsburgh at a synagogue, leaving several injured and at least three dead. Where do we find God’s promise of life?

The book of Job seems to offer a simple moral. Be faithful and God will reward you. In our reading today, “The LORD restored the fortunes of Job,” (Job 42:10-17.) But if you look at the whole book, Job has been transformed by his experience of God. He began by seeking God's justice, and ended by finding God's compassion.

The word ‘compassion’ means literally ‘to feel with’ someone. It’s not pity, or sympathy which can be given without a relationship to the person. The interesting thing about compassion is that it’s a gift that has to be passed on. You can’t keep it to yourself. Once you understand how we are all intimately connected with one another, then everyone’s happiness matters to you as much as your own. Just as everyone’s safety, wellness and security, whether they are your next door neighbor or a migrant seeking asylum becomes not just someone else’s concern, but your own.

Job understood this lesson even before his fortunes were restored to him. God was angry at the three friends of Job, who had tried to tell him that he must be guilty of something for his misfortunes. God didn’t like their simplistic reasoning that good=blessings and bad=curses. (P&C and the 2 bikes.) God tells them that their prayers will not be heard, unless Job prays for them. The restoration of Job happens after he prays for his three friends. He has compassion for them, as God has
compassion for him. In the Lord’s Prayer we pray, ‘forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others who trespass against us.’

Compassion also means that you are present to those who are suffering. In our Creed and elsewhere, we say, “We are not alone….God is with us.” Why should this matter in a world where innocent people suffer and evil people can carry out their deeds in the light of day? Some people might wonder if it makes any difference whether God is with us. Others might argue that God doesn’t matter at all, or even exist.

Like Job, we need to be transformed. Not just changed but renewed from within. Just as today we prayed for Alice Elizabeth to be transformed by baptism. We didn’t change her. We didn’t hand back a different baby.

This is the kind of transformation that happened to Bartimaeus, the blind beggar from Jericho. (Mark 10:46-52.) Some versions of the Bible call this ‘The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus’ (NSRV) while others call it, ‘Bartimaeus Receives His Sight,’ (New American Standard.) I think it’s an important distinction, because Jesus doesn’t actually heal him.

When he heard that it was Jesus who was coming by, he cries out to him, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mk 10:47.) By calling him the Son of David, he is acknowledging him as the suffering Messiah. James and John, and the rich young ruler have been unable to get it. They have been told three times that they are on the road to Jerusalem because it is there that Jesus will be crucified, suffer death, and rise again. They all want the power and the glory, but not the cross.
Bartimaeus is like the homeless people who get swept up and relocated when an important person is coming. The disciples try to shut him up, just like the people who are voiceless in our own society. But Bartimaeus just won’t shut up and go away. People who are poor or mentally ill or have addictions are told to shut up and go away. We blame them for their own circumstances.

Jesus tells his disciples to call Bartimaeus to him. Why didn’t he just call him himself? Is this an opportunity for the disciples to call someone to Jesus? Is it an example for us to remember that it is we who call the forgotten ones to Jesus by demonstrating our love for them?

Jesus asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mk.10:51.) Isn’t it obvious? The man is blind! But Jesus does not assume what we want from him. It’s up to us to ask.

Bartimaeus answers him using the term, ‘Rabboni’ which is an intimate word meaning Teacher or Master. It is the form of address that Mary will use when she meets the risen Christ.

Jesus tells him to go, because his faith has made him well, or whole. Jesus hasn’t done a thing except to listen to him. Oftentimes, that is the most important thing we can do. When someone has experienced a loss, we often want to rush in with words, to tell them ‘they’re in a better place’ or ‘everything happens for a reason.’ Like the friends of Job they want to make sense of what has happened. The best response is compassion, just to say ‘I’m so sorry’.
Bartimaeus is unable to do the one thing Jesus asks of him. He doesn’t go, but joins the disciples on the way to Jerusalem. Perhaps that is why he is named in this story. He becomes another disciple. One of the least has become one of the first in faith.

He chooses to follow Jesus because he recognizes God in him, even the God who will be with him in suffering and death. When we say ‘God is with us’ it should be a statement of humility, not of pride. The Creator of the universe, the One created us and knows us, chooses to love us. This is humbling.

Sometimes we like to think that God is on our side. If that’s true, it is because we are on God’s side. A lot of people like to claim God for themselves. But this week I read a statement by an evangelical pastor, who wrote, “I am a person of faith who also knows that a political party that claims God has their back carries so much danger to the larger good that people of real faith must, absolutely must, fight back.” (Patheos.com, The Thoughtful Pastor.)

The call of the church should be the call of the disciples to Bartimaeus, “Take heart, get up! He is calling for you,” (Mk 10:49.) Don’t be afraid; rise up from your fears or your apathy! Christ, who was raised from the dead, is with you now. And that makes all the difference. Thanks be to the Creator, the Spirit and the Christ who lives within us.

Amen.