

30th Sunday of the Year (B)

October 28, 2018

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Psalm 126

Hebrews 5:1-6

Mark 10:46-52

A young veteran asked to meet with me. When I sat down with him this week, he said that he had found it helpful when he had met with a chaplain in the past. I asked if he grew up in church. He said that he and his family attended a Catholic Church when his grandfather lived with them. "I never took any of the sacraments," he said. "I believe in God but God is a mean God. All the people who die or get hurt...that is a mean God."

In my group work with combat veterans, I have been focusing upon treating the "mind, body, and spirit." A holistic approach is very important for these individuals to find their way to a renewed sense of understanding, purpose, and meaning in their lives. I would like to think that these lessons today could help this young veteran see God from another perspective. If the spiritual aspect of one's life is never or poorly developed, one could well have a negative understanding of God.

The opening lesson today comes from that part of the book of Jeremiah known as the Book of Consolation. The people failed to hear God's word and they were herded off into desolation and exile. Here in this lesson they are coming home in glorious procession. God is re-gathering his people from all the nations where they have been scattered. It is good to notice this is not an army of the strong but the blind and the lame who cannot move very well. This journey is gentle enough for mothers and pregnant women. What we find here is a people in a delicate way...a people broken...a people once again assured of life in their homeland. Jeremiah announces that this vulnerable, dependent people are being gathered and led by a Shepherd Savior.

This lesson prepares us to hear the gospel passage where Jesus is on the road leading from Jericho to Jerusalem. Jesus is walking toward that great city of Jerusalem, that will soon be for him a place of vulnerability and powerlessness. Here along the road is a pretty important figure Bartaemus. We know he is important in Mark's gospel, first, because he is named while most of the individuals Jesus encounters were not named. Secondly, this is the last healing that Jesus performs as he is about to enter that place of suffering and death. This blind man Bartaemus very much stands in contrast to the apostles James and John in last Sunday's gospel. "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." They want Jesus to conform his will to their will. On the other hand, Bartaemus is pretty aware that he is indeed blind, while James and John are unaware how blind they truly are. Rather than open their eyes to Jesus, to the ministry of service, James and John are focused upon "shameless ambition." Their site is fixed on glory, sitting next to Jesus in the kingdom.

Bartaemus had heard of Jesus and when he yells out to Jesus, he chooses the name, Son of David. That is, he recognizes Jesus as the Messiah. "Have pity on me, have

mercy on me.” The people around Bartaemus want him to be quiet, you are only a beggar, you are insignificant, unimportant. As soon as Jesus gets wind of what is happening, he wants to see Bartaemus, he calls for Bartaemus. Here Jesus is representing the shepherd, the servant God that wishes to be there for his people in need. “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartaemus certainly wants to see, yet, it seems, he is looking for much more. Jesus responds by affirming the faith that Bartaemus has displayed. Jesus seems to be saying, that something is already there within you, this faith, your faith, has saved you. Jesus gives the man his sight. He does not ask or urge him to follow him, rather the man choose to follow Jesus into Jerusalem.

In many spiritual traditions, blindness is the inability to notice, understand, and integrate life experiences into one’s own self. Perhaps, you know yourself, you know what you are about, where you are going, what makes your life meaningful. I hope and pray that is indeed true for you. At the same time, we come here as beggars along the road of life. There is something more, much more, that I know will help me be a disciple of Jesus. In that way, Bartaemus is meant to be an inspiration as we move into this new week. Following Jesus we remain confident, we are on the right path!