

24th Sunday of the Year (B)

September 16, 2018

Isaiah 50:4c-9a

Psalm 116

James 2:14-18

Mark 8:27-35

I spend a great deal of time with individuals who have more than their share of suffering which can be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Some come into treatment with the hope that they will be able to cope with their suffering, others come with the unreal expectation that the treatment team will fix them. They learn early on that any progress toward recovery will only come through a joint effort, the willingness to work toward understanding and trust. This might be seen as having faith in oneself and faith in the the treatment team. In times of difficulty, as with these veterans and with the Church today, we look for something or someone that will anchor us.

The book of the prophet Isaiah is that book in the Hebrew Scriptures that has many passages related to that time when God would bring forth the figure of Christ. So many of Isaiah's words speak of this one who is going to come and there will be a new beginning and a fulness of hope. The conventional wisdom of the people, their expectation was a Messiah who would come and fix things. With power and might, this figure would take away all that the people were afraid of, get ride of the individuals that hurt and harm people, enable the people to rise above their problems and obstacles. Taking hold of the world politically and economically, the Christ would fix it, so that all could be happy and secure. This might be the expectation of the people, but this is not what we find in the Isaiah lesson today.

We are given a suffering servant...someone who struggles...who has difficulties...who is beaten, spit upon, treated poorly...and survives. We are told that this figure is able to endure all of this because of the help of God. More accurately, Isaiah gives us an image of someone who suffers through what they must with the knowledge that there is someone near that enables them to endure and work through and rise above. And so, the Messiah then is not one who fixes things but who takes us through things, helps us through things.

This brings us to the gospel passage from Mark that is considered pivotal as Jesus takes his disciples, the inner circle to a deeper understanding of the Messiah. Jesus begins with an easy question, "What are the others saying about me?" The disciples respond quickly, "They are saying this or that." And then it gets a little more difficult and personal, "What do you think? Who do you say that I am?" His question is met with silence until Peter speaks up with a wonderful profession of faith. Peter says, "You are the one who has the power of God in you. You are the one who is speaking the truth. You are the one we need to pay attention to. You are anointed!" Jesus offers Peter no word of affirmation but imposes silence on him and the disciples. Then, Jesus begins to seriously instruct them.

Jesus explains, "I am going to be humiliated. I am going to have to give myself over to the enemy. I am going to be crucified," which is like saying, "I am going to get into trouble

with the law. I am going to be executed, and then, I am going to rise on the third day.” Jesus makes it clear that this image of a suffering servant is at the heart of what he is anointed to bring to them and to the world. When Peter rebukes Jesus, Jesus sternly says to Peter, “Get behind me!” In other words, “Watch me, learn from me, follow me!”

Jesus came into the world, not to fix everything but to help us go through everything that isn't yet fixed. This includes the Church, the sin and failures, that are so close to home. Jesus lives among us, and together we go through everything. More than ever, I would say, we need to renew that partnership Jesus makes with us. I am doing my best to nurture a glimmer of hope, we will come through this dark moment in our Church and we will be better for it. The presence of Jesus, the Christ, is what saves us!

We take up our cross. With Jesus before us, must learn again how to be Church, how to be the people of God. May God forgive the failure of the Church and help us renew our focus on Jesus.