

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTACOST 10-24-21

JEREMIAH 31:7-9; PSALM 126; HEBREWS 7:23-28

MARK 10:46-52

GOOD MORNING

TODAY'S CENTRAL THEMES SEEM TO BRING POSITIVE MESSAGES OF FUTURE TIMES AND HEALING.

JEREMIAH LIVED DURING ONE OF THE MOST TURBULANT TIMES IN ISREAL'S HISTORY AS HE SAW THE NATION CONQUERED, THE TEMPLE DESTROYED, AND THE PEOPLE MARCHED INTO EXILE IN BABYLON. ALTHOUGH HE HAD WARNED OF THE COMING DESTRUCTION, HE ALSO KNEW THERE WOULD BE A TIME OF RESTORATION.

TODAY'S VERSES ARE FROM THE "BOOK OF CONSOLATION" IN WHICH THE LORD SPEAKS TO THE PEOPLE IN EXILE AND PROMISES THE FUTURE RETURN TO THEIR HOMELAND. THERE IS A POIGNANCY TO JEREMIAH'S WORDS THAT RESONATE TO ALL WHO HAVE BEEN SEPARATED AND LONG TO COME HOME.

THIS WILL BE A TIME OF REJOICING AND THANKSGIVING FOR THE LORD'S SALVATION: "PROCLAIM, GIVE PRAISE, AND SAY,

‘SAVE O LORD, YOUR PEOPLE, THE REMNANT OF ISREAL’’. THE LORD WILL GATHER THE PEOPLE FROM ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, WHEREVER THEY HAD BEEN SCATTERED, AND BRING THEM HOME AGAIN. IT WILL BE AN EASY ROAD TO TRAVEL – ONE THAT EVEN THE BLIND, THE LAME, “THOSE WITH CHILD AND THOSE IN LABOR” WILL BE ABLE TO FOLLOW.

THEY WILL COME WITH WEEPING, BUT GOD WILL COMPASSIONATELY GUIDE THEM BACK “IN A STRAIGHT PATH IN WHICH THEY SHALL NOT STUMBLE’’. THEY ARE REMINDED THAT THE LORD IS A FATHER TO ISRAEL AND “EPHRAIM IS MY FIRST BORN’’. ISRAEL’S FAVORED STATUS IS PROCLAIMED HERE; SINCE IN HEBREW TRADITION THE FIRSTBORN RECEIVED A DOUBLE SHARE OF A FATHER’S ESTATE AS WELL AS PATERNAL BLESSINGS AND THE RIGHT TO SUCCEED HIM.

THE LORD WHO HAD SCATTERED THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AS A JUDGMENT AGAINST THE NATION WILL NOW GATHER AND GUARD THEM LIKE A SHEPHERD. GOD’S DESIRE IS FOR RESTITUTION, RECONCILIATION, AND A PLACE OF REST FOR

GOD'S PEOPLE. THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL IS LIKE THE RETURN OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND BARTIMAEUS, WHO GOES FORTH WITH RENEWED LIFE.

FROM ZION'S HEIGHT THE PEOPLE WILL REJOICE IN GOD'S GOODNESS AND BOUNTY, AS THEIR MOURNING IS TURNED INTO JOY; FOR THE LORD GIVES "GLADNESS FOR SORROW".

THE PSALMIST GIVES VOICE TO THE JUBILATION OF THE RETURN TO ISRAEL – AN EVENT THAT SEEMED LIKE A DREAM. THOSE WHO SOWED TEARS, NOW REAP JOY AND LAUGHTER. THE OTHER NATIONS NOTICE THE LORD'S FAVOR ON ISRAEL AS THE PEOPLE PROCLAIM IN THANKSGIVING "THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR US AND WE REJOICED".

THE GOSPEL STORY OF THE RESTORATION OF SIGHT TO BARTIMAEUS PROVIDES AN EXAMPLE OF A NEW WAY OF SEEING – ON BOTH A LITERAL AND A METAPHORICAL LEVEL. THIS SECTION OF MARK'S GOSPEL (CHAPTER 8 – CHAPTER 10) BEGAN WITH THE HEALING OF AN ANONYMOUS BLIND MAN, AND CONCLUDES WITH THE HEALING OF BLIND

BARTIMAEUS – THE ONLY PERSON HEALED BY JESUS WHO IS CALLED BY NAME IN MARK. THE OTHER THREE EVANGELISTS WHO REPORT THIS INCIDENT DO NOT NAME HIM. IT IS SIGNIFICANT WHEN A NAME IS PRESERVED FOR US. SIMILARLY, OF ALL THE PARABLES JESUS TOLD, THE ONLY CHARACTER WHO EVER HAD A NAME WITH A PARABLE WAS THE POOR MAN LAZARUS...

NOT ONLY IS BARTIMAEUS MEMORY PRESERVED FOR US – WE EVEN LEARN HIS FATHER’S NAME! IT’S A REMINDER TO US THAT THE PEOPLE WHOM JESUS HEALED IN THE COURSE OF HIS MINISTRY WERE FLESH-AND-BLOOD HUMAN BEING, NOT MERE SYMBOLS OF THIS OR THAT CONDITION, ILLNESS, OR DISEASE. THE POOR, IMPOVERISHED AND DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE WITH REAL FEELINGS, WITH A FAMILY HISTORY, WITH PEOPLE WHO ONCE UPON A TIME LOVED THEM AND TOOK CARE OF THEM, WHETHER OR NOT ANYONE FROM THE FAMILY IS ON THE SCENE ANY LONGER. PERHAPS IT SEEMS LIKE I’M MAKING TOO BIG A DEAL OF THIS, BUT IT’S IMPORTANT FOR THE CHURCH TO THIS DAY TO BE REMINDED THAT THE POOR AND THE

DISENFRANCHISED TO WHOM WE ARE CALLED TO MINISTER ARE NOT BROAD AND FACELESS SOCIO-ECONOMIC CATAGORIES ABOUT WHOM TO TALK IN THE ABSTRACT. THESE ARE REAL PEOPLE. THEY BEAR THE IMAGE OF GOD....

WHEN THE POOR DO CRY OUT TO SOMEONE REPUTED TO BE IMPORTANT AND POWERFUL, SOCIETY'S FIRST INCLINATION IS TO HUSH THEM UP. MAYBE THE GOOD CITIZENS OF JERICHO SAW THIS MAN AS A SOCIAL EMBARRASSMENT, AN EYESORE, A BLOW TO CIVIC PRIDE. LETTING JESUS SEE HIM WOULD MAKE THEM ALL LOOK BAD. BEST TO HUSH HIM UP. BUT THE TAWDRY NATURE OF HUMAN PRIDE IS ON DISPLAY HERE, TOO, IN THAT THE MOMENHT THE MAN IS INVITED TO COME OVER TO THE VIP IN THEIR MIDST. NOW SUDDENLY PEOPLE FLOCK TO HIM, TREAT HIM LIKE HE HAS COLLATERAL IMPORTANCE. IT'S AMAZING HOW QUICKLY WE CAN PIVOT FROM AVOIDING, IF NOT ACTIVELY DISSING, A PERSON TO WANTING TO COZY UP TO HIM/HER THE MOMENT THIS PERSON CAN GIVE US A CONNECTION TO SOMEONE FAMOUS ...

IN ANY EVENT, THERE ARE A LOT OF SOCIAL DYNAMICS GOING ON THIS STORY, MOST OF WHICH ARE INSTRUCTIVE FOR THE CHURCH TODAY. THE EMPHASIS HERE, HAS BEEN ON HELPING OTHERS, PRIMARILY HIS DISCIPLES, UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FOLLOWER OF JESUS – A CALL TO SERVICE AND SACRIFICE RATHER THAN PRESTIGE OR POWER. ULTIMATELY, THE HEALING OF BARTIMAEUS HOLDS OUT THE HOPE THAT THE DISCIPLES SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS WILL EVENTUALLY BE OVERCOME AS WELL.

THE THEME OF THE READINGS (PERCEPTIONS) LED ME TO SHARE THE FOLLOWING WITH YOU WRITTEN BY MICHAEL MAYNES, ANGLICAN PRIEST AND FORMER DEAN OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY IN LONDON IN HIS “SUNRISE OF WONDER” ...

“PART OF BEING HUMAN IS TO EXPERIENCE MOMENTS OF TRUE PERCEPTION ABOUT THOSE THINGS THAT TOUCH YOU SO INTIMATELY THAT SUDDENLY YOU SEE. WHAT YOU SEE OR READ OR HEAR AT SUCH MOMENTS HAS A RING OF TRUTH ABOUT IT, NOT JUST OF A GENERAL KIND BUT AS

SOMETHING THAT TAKES ON A DIMENSION AND DEPTH FOR YOU SO THAT IT BECOMES YOUR TRUTH. IT SEEMS TO BE MAKING A CLAIM ON YOU.

SUCH MOMENTS DON'T COME OFTEN. HOLD ON TO THEM. CHERISH THEM UNTIL THEY BECOME SO MUCH A PART OF YOU AS TO BE SECOND NATURE. FOR THERE IS ONLY ONE PERSISTENT DEMAND MADE UPON US BY THE SPIRIT. IT IS THAT WE ARE RECEPTIVE. THAT WE KEEP OUR EYES OPEN, OUR MINDS UNCLOSED. IT IS, IN SHORT, THAT WE RETAIN ALL OUR LIVES A SENSE OF WONDER.”. AMEN