

PENTECOST 23

Proper 25 - Year B

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Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

Jeremiah 31:7-9

⁷For thus says the Lord:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
“Save, O Lord, your people,
the remnant of Israel.”

⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north

and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labor together;
a great company, they shall return here.

⁹With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back;
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path where they shall not stumble,
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

In today's Old Testament passage from Jeremiah, the prophet offers a message of hope and redemption to the Israelites, who have had their lives torn apart by war, terror, and trauma. The book of Jeremiah addresses the Babylonian exile of the Israelites. As hopeless as this situation must have seemed, God will keep promises made to God's people. God will restore the exiles to the promised land. God is still the same God who saved the Hebrew people from their slavery in Egypt.

The people who will be saved are not the strong and the healthy; they are a vulnerable people, blind and lame, possibly due to mistreatment at the hands of their captors. They are also those who are vulnerable because they are pregnant and in labor. At the same time, they represent renewal and the promise of future generations. This group of blind, disabled, and pregnant people seem unlikely to survive, but in God's economy, it is not the strong who survive but those who turn to God for help.

The people come weeping. These people have been through generations of trauma. God promises to console their mental anguish and to care for them. He promises to be both their shepherd, leading them “by brooks of water,” and their father.

Discussion Questions

Jeremiah reminds us that, when we cry out to God for help, God can enter even situations that seem hopeless. Can you think of a time in your life when you felt God's presence in a situation that seemed hopeless?

When situations seem hopeless, do you think that it is more difficult or easier to ask God for help?

Psalm 126

- ¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, *
then were we like those who dream.
- ² Then was our mouth filled with laughter, *
and our tongue with shouts of joy.
- ³ Then they said among the nations, *
"The Lord has done great things for them."
- ⁴ The Lord has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.
- ⁵ Restore our fortunes, O Lord, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.
- ⁶ Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.
- ⁷ Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their
sheaves.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

Today's psalm poetically describes the same topic as the passage of Jeremiah, the return of Israel from their captivity in Babylon. The impossible has occurred. They have become "like those who dream." The restoration seems surreal. This is a psalm of thanksgiving and praise; God has turned the people's sorrow into joy. The term "joy" appears three times. Their exhilaration is uncontainable.

Discussion Questions

Children shout for joy. People at sports events often shout for joy. In what situations have you ever shouted for joy? In the context of worship, do you think there is a place for shouts of joy?

What other ways do you express joy to God?

Hebrews 7:23-28

²³ Furthermore, the former priests were many in number because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints as high priests humans, who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

The letter to the Hebrews is distinctive for its description of Jesus as our great high priest. It promises that Jesus lives to make intercession for those who approach God through him. Jesus is continually working to save us, praying for us and with us. When we pray the psalms, we pray not only with the communion of saints but also with Jesus.

The events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection occurred so long ago that they can seem remote, but the Book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus' love for us is active in the present moment. Similarly, salvation sometimes seems like a future event, but it is also an action that is occurring in the present. Jesus is saving us now, as well as in the past and in the future.

Discussion Questions

The role of a priest is to mediate between people and God. Is the image of Jesus as a great high priest one that normally comes to mind when you think about Jesus? Does contemplating this image expand your understanding of Jesus?

In his human lifetime, Jesus prayed often. Does the idea of Jesus continuing to make intercession for us seem surprising?

Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” ⁵²Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

In our Gospel passage today, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar asks for and receives his sight from Jesus. The physical healing that Jesus performed points us to the spiritual healing that he offers for all. Jesus announces to Bartimaeus that his faith has made him well. His life is transformed, and he immediately follows Jesus.

It is ironic that Bartimaeus, despite his lack of physical sight, seems to have a better understanding of who Jesus is than his disciples do at this point in Jesus' life. Bartimaeus also reminds us of the vulnerable people who will be rescued by God in today's passage from Jeremiah.

All of today's passages point to healing and reconciliation out of pain and suffering. They also all remind us of the importance of crying out to God for what we need, turning to God through life's difficulties, and trusting in God's ability to restore us.

Finally, it is so interesting that Jesus asks Bartimaeus what he wants him to do. It seems obvious that Bartimaeus would want to be healed. Jesus' question implies that people do not always want to be healed, that they do not always want his help to “see” more clearly.

Discussion Questions

What do you think Jesus would like you to see more clearly?

Why do you think this blind beggar seemed to understand Jesus' nature better than Jesus' own disciples did?