

Weekend of Sunday, July 5, 2020

5th Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 14/Proper 9/Year A

First Reading: Zechariah 9:9-12

Second Reading: Romans 7:15-25a

Gospel Reading: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Sermon Title: “*Lord of the Weary*”

Theme

Jesus chides people who find fault with both his ministry and that of John the Baptist. He thanks God that wisdom and intelligence are not needed to receive what God has to offer.

Text

Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] ¹⁶“To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Sermon

This is an interesting Gospel Reading. The first thing I want to know is, what is the context, and who is Jesus talking to that elicited his response – which, as I read it, feels a bit snarky.

Looking back to the beginning of Chapter 11, Jesus had just sent his Disciples out on their first missionary journey without him and was headed out to other cities by himself, when he was interrupted by disciples of John the Baptizer, who gave them a message to ask Jesus. John's question was,

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" ⁴Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at?"

So I conclude that the "crowds" that he addressed did not include his own Disciples or the disciples of John, and I further conclude that they were likely peasant Jews who came out to see and hear him preach, teach, and perform signs and miracles. In this passage, to the crowds, he went into a discussion about John being the greatest of prophets. But even here in this passage, Jesus asked what I think could be taken as a snarky rhetorical question. "What did you go out to see?"

Now it is true that John was eccentric, peculiar, downright weird. I suspect that his fiery sermons and unrestrained tongue made him quite the spectacle. In fact, in verse eighteen of the Gospel Reading for today, Jesus said, that many people misunderstood his eccentricities as being demon-possessed! That was offensive to Jesus because as Jesus said, John was the greatest of all prophets.

In our Gospel Reading for today, I sense him getting a little *more* frustrated with people when he said,

¹⁸"John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"

Through all of this, I hear Jesus venting, "What do you people want?" Will anything make you happy? You wear me out with your unwillingness to get with the program!"

What to do? Well, Jesus turned to prayer – and it is obvious that he said this prayer out loud. He did this from time to time because I think he saw it as a teachable moment – and what we can learn at this moment is that when we get weary of people or situations we ought to pray. He prayed:

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

And that is where I think the prayer ends.

Now in that prayer, I think what Jesus meant was that the crowds were overthinking everything. *You heard John was the great prophet and when you got a look at him you called him crazy. And now you see me and call me a glutton, a drunkard and friend of sinners. Little children, just observe me and my ministry and accept me for what they see. But you? You overthink everything. Faith in God revealed in me is not that difficult.*

"Stupid peasants," we say. Really? Are we any smarter when it comes to our faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ? Really, smarter? Does the living of our lives indicate that?

When something happens to us or to someone we love, is our first thought to take it to the LORD in prayer? I'll be honest, it is not for me. I always look at any given situation and ask myself what can I do to make that situation better. A better first response would be, "Lord, I have a situation here. Help me to make the best possible decisions for the best possible outcome. Amen" Then take a look at that situation and trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Do I not trust that God was involved in the first scenario where I made a decision "on my own?" No that's not it, I am never on my own, the Holy Spirit is always guiding my thoughts and actions. But involving the LORD at the beginning relieves me of the burden and puts things in the right order.

This last week I had to break the news to a couple of couples that I will be marrying here at Zion that we will not be able to host their 300 guests in this sanctuary. And there are other conditions I will impose to follow the guidance of health care professionals. But as I have told you a couple of times, I told them, "there are opportunities even in a pandemic. Rather than wring your hands and worry about what you cannot do. Be creative in what you can do." (PAUSE)

At the end of this passage, our Lord Jesus seems to have shifted his attitude from frustration with this thankless crowd of stupid people (my words, not his) to the loving and compassionate Lord we know him to be. I'm going to read it for you again because we love these words. Read it along with me out loud if you want to.

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

We are all living in a pandemic right now, and so I think I know a lot about what you are experiencing because I am experiencing it too.

- I hate all the precautions we have to take, here and everywhere else, that make me feel like I am unclean.
- I hate not being able to sing hymns and songs of praise to the LORD who has so richly blessed my life.
- I hate not being able to look you in the whole face and greet you, and see your smiles. Same experience in any store, right? Do you avoid making eye contact? Do you do the sideways-shimmy to get by the shopper who is oblivious to the arrows on the floor?
- I hate having to give you Holy Communion like it was radioactive.
- I hate not being able to visit our homebound and infirmed – except by phone.

- I hate not having coffee hour before and after worship and Sunday School and Bible Study and Ministry Table meetings and fellowship events and work projects. These are the ways we live out our lives of discipleship.
- I miss eating out or being able to do just about anything I want to.
- I miss my family and friends most of all.
- I also hate it that, since we are in a pandemic, common courtesies like wearing the mask that protects the other, and practicing social distancing has become a political issue.
- And I hate it that arguably the most affluent, the most successful, the best-educated nation in the world has become the pandemic poster child for bad pandemic behavior.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

But I know we are all in this together, and I trust you are praying to the LORD for relief for the world.

I know you are weary of it all, I am too. Fortunately, long before the pandemic, our Lord Jesus has been the Lord of the Weary. No, you won't find that title in your Bibles, but it is true never the less. He said so himself in today's Gospel Reading.

So you have problems too, I know. Take them to Jesus, because he is the Lord of the weary. And smile. He's got this.

Prayer

Lord of the Weary, give us faith like a child and send your Holy Spirit to remind us that you are still on the throne and in control, especially when it feels to us like things are out of control. Gently remind us to come to you first in all things. And give us back our smiles. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen