

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 18th 2016

VENGEANCE! BETRAYAL! TERROR! DEATH! O MY!

But wait...

“In my distress, I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice.”

Just like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, we try to listen to the voice of GOOD for direction. We follow the path, and inevitably it will lead us into the darkness to face a GREEN WITCH, LIONS, TIGERS, AND BEARS! Yes, O MY! Such are the lives of the prophets in their efforts to keep people and nations on the right path, through the darkness, overcome the oppression, and to a place we can finally say...“there is no place like home.” That is, of course, if we listen and are courageous enough to do so. Facing threats and challenges, we call out to God to find our way home, and discover God dwelling within us. We manage to get through the darkness and achieve what we are called to be, and to do. “In my distress, I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice.”

Jeremiah, a prophet during the reign of Judah’s five last kings, challenges the community to turn away from the idols that became a center for their lives. His own people turn against him to the point of his life being threatened. Where is the memory of the people of a God who chooses to be in relationship with them? Jeremiah knows their history of sin and grace and turns to God for help in any way possible. He is desperate! Out of his experience of a faithful God, he asks God for vengeance!

Jesus, on the other hand, announces a new covenant and presents a vision not of a vengeful God but a loving God. God is a God of peace and nonviolence who desires an intimate relationship. He calls God his Father who consecrated him and sent him into the world. Early on in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus proclaims his prophetic vocation by reading from Isaiah. He has been anointed to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, set the downtrodden free, release to prisoners and proclaim a year of Jubilee! Today we see, once again where Jesus is threatened by his own people. He doesn’t seem to be living up to their expectations of a Messiah. Blasphemer! They call him. Soon they will cry out CRUCIFY HIM!

Jesus might be thinking what’s wrong with you people? “I have shown you many good works from my Father...and you are trying to stone me.” He escapes....this time.

Given both experiences, people, and a nation were threatened by the GOOD. God is interrupting their lives and they responded with death to the messenger! What for? Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for 27

years in opposition to apartheid in South Africa said “Resentment (vengeance) is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill your enemies.” No favorable outcome here!

As I read, prayed and reflected on these scripture passages, I considered...

First: When, within my own spiritual journey, was I challenged to consider my own formation of a moral conscience, social consciousness, a Gospel mandate to respond to injustices, wars, and work for peace? I was frightened, challenged, prayed for courage and found myself in solidarity with others who lived Gospel lives. We spoke out, marched, and protested in nonviolent ways. It was the time of the Viet Nam War, and the Civil Rights movements.

Second: I thought of the prophets within our own history of sin and grace. Those people who challenged global and national state of affairs within our time and history. Their lives were threatened, and for some, lives taken for nonviolently witnessing to freedom, justice, peace, and living a life of solidarity with the oppressed. Consider a few though the list is long... Rutilo Grande Garcia, SJ, Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King, Jean Donovan, Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Dorothy Day, Joan Chittister, OSB, Simone Campbell, SSS, and Pope Francis who proclaimed a Jubilee Year of Mercy! They carried, and carry within them the vision of the reign of God. The list goes on.....

Here we are in the Fifth Week of Lent. We are about to walk with Jesus to Jerusalem and to his death. Some questions to consider: Have I taken the time to look deeply at what drives my thoughts and actions? Have I considered the dark and sinful side of my life as well as our own national/global history of sin and grace? Who are the prophets of today that I want to follow? What motivates my following? What keeps me from following? Is it rooted in vengeance or love, loss or trust, individualism or relationship, community, and the greater GOOD? Some of this may rattle you a bit.

But wait...

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