

FIRST READING: Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

This word of the LORD came to me: Go, cry out this message for Jerusalem to hear! I remember the devotion of your youth, how you loved me as a bride, Following me in the desert, in a land unsown. Sacred to the LORD was Israel, the first fruits of his harvest; Should any presume to partake of them, evil would befall them, says the LORD. When I brought you into the garden land to eat its goodly fruits, You entered and defiled my land, you made my heritage loathsome. The priests asked not, "Where is the LORD?" Those who dealt with the law knew me not: the shepherds rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after useless idols. Be amazed at this, O heavens, and shudder with sheer horror, says the LORD. Two evils have my people done: they have forsaken me, the source of living waters; They have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 36:6-7ab, 8-9, 10-11

With you is the fountain of life, O Lord.

O LORD, your mercy reaches to heaven; your faithfulness, to the clouds. Your justice is like the mountains of God; your judgments, like the mighty deep.

With you is the fountain of life, O Lord.

How precious is your mercy, O God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They have their fill of the prime gifts of your house; from your delightful stream you give them to drink.

With you is the fountain of life, O Lord.

For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light. Keep up your mercy toward your friends, your just defense of the upright of heart.

With you is the fountain of life, O Lord.

Gospel:

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 13:10-17

The disciples approached Jesus and said, "Why do you speak to the crowd in parables?" He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because *they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand*. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: *You shall indeed hear but not understand, you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and be converted and I heal them*. "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 16th Thursday of the Year II

Jeremiah's words were in a riddle and Jesus' words were in a parable. Why would they speak that way? I've been a preacher for many years now, and have always striven to be clear in thought with a message that is grounded in experience. It takes time and effort to discern what they mean. What or who is Jerusalem? How is God a source of water? What's a broken cistern and how are people like one? To whom did Jesus speak in today's gospel and why would he not want people to see and hear so they could understand him?

God's message to Jeremiah was never intended to be given to a city, institution, business or even a group of people. This message is of a personal nature that is meant to change an individual's life. God gave life to each individual who heard God's message. God loved them to life, freedom, faith, family, land and community. Water is a metaphor for God's gifts. God's life has entered the lives of each living, believing and loving person. Living water has nothing to do with tap water; it is God's indwelling presence in each of our lives. We, as believers, actively seek God's presence each time we pray to, think of or remember God. Sometimes we get broken by sin, doubts, pain and fear. We can turn to God who always forgives and heals. We can turn to others too. God works through us and others as we help those who need us. God repairs our brokenness through many means.

We have to remember that Jeremiah spoke to a certain people in a certain time the words God wanted them to hear. Those long ago are not the only ones to whom God spoke. God speaks also to us. His Word, Jesus, still lives. The Word of scripture speaks for all time. All who hear it and read it can understand what God says. The challenge to change was for the people of Jeremiah's day and it is for us today. How can we turn from our sins? We seek God who can forgive us in an infinite, eternal and unconditional mercy. We can then become witnesses of God's life, becoming God's living water ourselves to others. God works through us.

Jesus spoke these words to his disciples. They were gathered around him for his instruction of them. We gain, today, an insight into their formation to become ministers and missionaries. We can forget that Jesus had to teach them. A disciple is one who seeks knowledge and insight from a master. Jesus was a rabbi, which means teacher in English. Parables are not just stories, anecdotes or fables. A parable, at first, can sound simple and familiar, due to the fact we've heard them so often. But they are often ambivalent on a deeper level and can lead a reader deeper into it, seeking meaning. A parable is also memorable and can persist in our minds. They lead us into wonder as we discover new meaning in them each time we reread them.

Jesus can draw anyone who seeks him more closely into his teaching through parables. I've been preaching, using them as the basis on my homilies for years and have not yet run out of solid material. Perhaps you have found this to be true as well. Jesus wants to draw us more closely to his words, thoughts and lessons. Granted, some may never seem to come to faith. But we have. We have seen and heard what Jesus has said. By God's grace we come to understand that God is love that has no bounds. In God's love we have life, faith, hope and love. In God's love we know salvation through the forgiveness of our sins. How have these stories transformed us? Blessed are our eyes and ears; we believe.

May our lives be holy as we move more deeply into God's life.

James D. Beath
July 21, 2022