

"Peace"
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 9
9 July 2023
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church
San Francisco, California

Zechariah 9:9-12
Psalm 145:8-15
Romans 7:15-25a
St. Matthew 11:16-19

INI

I'm going to start off with the problematic reading for this morning, naturally the one from Saint Paul. In it he makes a confession in which he sees a struggle within himself between the good that he wants to do and the evil that he actually does. He says < "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." It is something that I intimately understand, being convinced by the gospel of a thousand good things that I should do, and my lack of courage to actually do them. This is voiced in our confession of sins, "we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. Guilty!

It is a good thing to take some moments to live in Paul's dilemma, his argument against himself, his on-going guilt, his inability to look to the forgiveness afforded him in the Gospel. It is a turmoil into which we are all placed, a self-deprecation that condemns all of us. Let us leave that situation aside, for a moment, returning to it later, after hearing the prophet and psalmist's good news, and Jesus' promise to us.

In the first reading, the prophet Zephaniah pleads the case for peace. One aspect of Zephaniah's promise is that political peace will soon be evident in the land. He has the image of a messianic leadership that is called upon to lead the land, perhaps in the time of national difficulty, and the time of national leaders who have ignored the covenant with God. There is an aspect to this reading that comes to my mind. In 1975, I and some other clergy, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Jewish, Catholic, and Baptist were invited by the Israeli government to visit the Holy Land. One of our first stops was it Kibbutz Lavi, built in the Galilean hills. There, in an evening meeting with members of the Kibbutz, we discussed the relationship with the Palestinians, and the problem of the land. As we discussed this, and elderly woman, sitting in a rocker, and knitting, calmly quoted the prophet Zephaniah, on the problem of Palestinians and the land. She said, "*his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.*" Her implication was that Israel was promised all the land from the Mediterranean to the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley. The "newcomers", the Palestinians weren't included in that promise. *The good that I would, I cannot.* National leaders seem to be caught in a web of self-interest, condemning certain peoples to having nothing.

There are two themes resounding in the Gospel for today. The audience that Jesus addresses in the first part of the Gospel are quick to tell of their disappointment. *"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance, we wailed, and you did not mourn."* In short, you did not meet our expectations of what the messiah should be like. Such an attitude was not the sole property of those who stood outside of the Jesus Circle, offering criticism. Preceding this pericope that forms today's Gospel is a pericope in which the disciples of John the Baptist come to Jesus to ask him a question, *"Are you the one that is to come or should we look for another."* There is disappointment all about. Jesus takes the position that the proof of the prophet is in the pudding. He tells John's disciples, *"Go and tell what you have seen and heard."* Jesus ends this section with revealing the relationship of him and the father, and that Jesus' is merely revealing God's will.

Peace is always accompanied by doubt – doubt that we can accomplish it. Or, better yet, peace that comes in spite of us and our self-interest. It is a burden that we carry with Paul, with ancient Israel, with other prophets, with Christians of whatever stripe, with religious people of every kind. It is a peace that we have to struggle for personally and nationally.

Jesus closes the Gospel for today with a promise, that we need to take into our very lives – a peace that will set us at rest so that we might begin to evidence the good news in the acts of our lives. *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* That is why we are here – to live in forgiveness and wholeness, to forgive ourselves and to forgive others, and to do what we along with Paul have found so difficult to do.