

The twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost 2021

Jeremiah 31:7-9, Psalm 126, Hebrews 7:21-28, Mark 10:46-52

Those that sow in tears: shall reap with songs of joy.

My favourite teacher at Secondary School was Mr. EV King – I never knew his first name. He taught history and I remember thinking he was himself an ancient monument, I thought he was incredibly old. He had an old fashioned rather one - dimensional way of teaching. He would sit perched on the desk or in his chair rocking backwards and forwards simply lecturing us. More often than not he would be holding onto the lapels of his tweed jacket and smoking a cigar, ah...those were the days! What Mr. King did for me was help me understand the importance of history in understanding the present world and indeed the future. I have enjoyed reading history ever since.

When I began theological study I was warned that it might well ruin any faith I had, but the opposite occurred, I felt myself liberated by my study. As I began reading more serious theology this love of history stood me in good stead and the further I progressed I began to realise that one way of reading the Bible was to understand what I meant then and what it means now and what might it mean for us tomorrow! But I was moving into middle age when I began and I wondered, I am I getting too fixed in my ways? Would my new found liberation last? About ten years or so before I began my study a book was published called *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning*. The author describes a number of obstacles to learning: the need to be right, the fear of being wrong, the security of the known, the pain of un-learning, the work of re-thinking, the disturbance of dissonance, the ubiquity of distraction. Understanding these potential barriers was very important. They remain a problem for us as we learn about matters of faith.

We are living in times of great change: technology, the environment, relationships, gender, I could go on. Many folk are fearful of these changes, we are having to un-learn and it is for many painful, for some there is need to be right, for others there is the fear of getting it wrong. These issues are prevalent in our society and they are at work in our Church. What they do is stymie us, hold us back they create a distance from our faith and the world around us that we find hard, some find it impossible to bridge and many give up.

The Prophet Jeremiah is renowned as a prophet of doom. He is predominantly a pre-exilic prophet, he spoke before the people of Jerusalem were taken into captivity in Babylon; his message was one of warning. And then in midst of it all we have chapter 31, it is like a cup of water for someone dying of thirst, it is like an oasis. It is like being in the wilderness and suddenly stumbling upon a cricket oval with a white picket fence and an immaculately attired waiter offering you a gin and tonic! It is a radical vision of something completely new.

This is the story of Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. I am reliably informed that the Hebrew root of the name Bartimaeus –means “son of the unclean”. Here is someone who is the victim of intergenerational disadvantage, he has found himself in the wilderness both literally and metaphorically. This is not the man

born blind, this is the man who once could see and now pleads to be able to see again, to see anew. Here is the character that pleads for a new vision as Mark concludes an episode in which we have wealth and power as stumbling blocks to following Jesus, think of the rich young man and the disciples James and John – the Thor brothers!

What Jeremiah pointed to and what Jesus embodied was a new way, it required those around them to be prepared to rethink almost everything they thought about themselves and the order of things; fundamentally the issues then in their time are strikingly similar to those we face today in the Church: the need to be right, the fear of being wrong, the security of the known, the pain of un-learning, the work of re-thinking, the disturbance of dissonance, the ubiquity of distraction.

The disturbance of dissonance. Bartimaeus followed Jesus on the way; we hear nothing more of him. From Jericho we arrive in Jerusalem, Jesus is welcomed as the King in the succession of David just as Bartimaeus had said, perhaps he was in the crowd on that first palm Sunday...within a week Jesus was dead. The comfort of Jeremiah in chapter 31 is soon to be stifled by the fall of Jerusalem.

This dissonance remains a stumbling block to our faith, and it always will. This is why we must be, as the creed says, looking for the resurrection; celebrating it, making it real for us today. Mr. King taught me that history means something today, the resurrection is like that, but in spades. Today as we celebrate the work of the UN and closer to home the work of Anglicare. These are organisations who have to deal with the seemingly endless issues of ancient rivalries and violence that begets poverty and want and nearer to home intergenerational need. Those who work in the forefront of these organisations experience daily the dissonance between faith and the lived world. Their role is always to strive to see things anew, to look for the resurrection. The crucified and resurrected Jesus as the letter to the Hebrews tell us is the only answer to that dissonance. He is the priest, the Pontifex, the bridge that makes that possible. Those that sow in tears: shall reap with songs of joy. Amen.