

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 31:7-9 and Mark 10:46-52

"Are we there yet?" Have you ever heard that from a little voice in your back seat? That little voice, so unaware of the reality of distance and so unable to manage delayed gratification, speaks up inside us our whole lives. We start by wishing away the school year, longing for summer vacation. Later we cannot wait to get a place of our own. We long to get married or get our dream job, then a promotion, a bigger house or fancy car. We cannot wait until the kids are out of diapers, can drive themselves, are out of the house, give us grandkids. Then, when we are moving toward death and a future that is totally unknown, we aim to return to health and independence, holding onto possessions and self-images that no longer make sense but are familiar and safe.

We are caught in the [myth of arrival](#), "the idea that once you have 'arrived' at a certain point in your life, everything will fall into place, and the life you have waited for will finally begin." Currently we engage in this myth when we think about the pandemic: once it is over, life will return to normal and we will be happy once again. Were we really that happy before the pandemic?

The gospel this Sunday is the last story in Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. It is sandwiched between James and John's request for positions of honor and the Palm Sunday crowd that hails Jesus as King David's heir, who will return Israel to power. The people in these bookends are caught in the myth of arrival. Contrastingly, "on hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, [Bartimaeus] began to cry out." This blind person uses the ability he has to recognize the opportunity in front of him now. And Jesus is eager to help: Bartimaeus cries out twice and Jesus, through the crowd, calls back three times. Bartimaeus asks for sight because it is what he needs to live fully in the present. This is the faith that saves, Jesus says.

Bartimaeus naturally follows Jesus "on the way." Discipleship is about being in this moment with a purpose to love to the best of our ability. It is a journey in the sense that we get better at it the more we love. It is also a journey in the sense that an openness to love brings us into situations we never could have foreseen. Some of those situations are horrible and some are lovely; some are even both. Jesus' followers focus on the process of being changed by love and becoming love.

Bartimaeus does not travel alone; nor do we. We journey with Jesus. We journey with other believers who also love the Way for itself, not as something to be endured and discarded. In John's gospel, Jesus calls himself the Way; the journey is Jesus. Mark names this reality the Kingdom of God, already begun in Jesus and somehow yet to be fulfilled. Our lives are this mystery of travel with and in our God.

So we read in Jeremiah this week as well. The conflicting verb tenses – "The Lord has delivered" vs. "I will gather them" – express the reality of being in the midst of a process. What's more, Jer 31 acknowledges, "trauma changes people forever."¹ God leads home the blind and the lame, the mothers and the pregnant. Where are the strong men, the armies? This is the remnant of Israel. Yet there is potential here: the women literally hold the future; the blind and the lame carry the wisdom of compassion born through suffering. God eagerly offers support by delivering, bringing back, gathering, consoling, guiding and providing water. None will stumble on this journey, God promises.

In closing, these two writers summarize what we can carry with us this week. Lavina D'Souza says, "Life is not about arriving or reaching the destination... It is the silent, unassuming presence of a fellow human being walking beside you."² The poet Mary Oliver tells us, "There are things you can't reach. But/ you can reach out to them, and all day long./ The wind, the bird flying away. The idea of God./ And it can keep you as busy as anything else, and happier."³

- ❖ What do you need from Jesus for the moment you are in?
- ❖ What is there to enjoy about the current stage of your journey of discipleship?

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¹ Jose Enrique Aguilar Chui. "Mark" *Paulist Biblical Commentary*. Paulist Press. 2018. p. 698.

² <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/ministry/column/will-i-be-able-make-it-other-side>

³ Mary Oliver. "Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does It End?" *Devotions*. Penguin Books. 2017. p. 186.