

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 14th 2015

Can our God really help us? Can we really have hope in the midst of great struggles?

These are the questions being asked and addressed in today's readings - by Ezechiel's community, by the community in Corinth, and by the community under persecution, who first heard Mark's gospel, and by us today.

At the time of the Babylonian captivity, it seemed that the people had no more hope - and that they certainly wondered how God's promises could be fulfilled. Is it possible for God to be faithful? In the midst of this? The power of their captors seems overwhelming. Ezekiel explains that God really is powerful. God can, and will, take a shoot and plant it as their future. What appears to be powerful will be brought down and what is lowly will be raised up. Mary speaks like that in her Magnificat. The child conceived in her womb would be that surprising sign of God's fidelity.

In Corinth, in the early Church, they must have been losing courage. They had come to believe that their true home is in heaven, with their risen Lord, who won victory over sin and death. So, how were they to live in this place here, which isn't their true home? What does everything here mean? Paul says that we have courage "for we walk by faith, not by sight."

Jesus prepares his disciples, and us, for the journey ahead. God's reign, he explains, is not the way we think of reign and power. It is like the farmer who sows seed, but doesn't really know how they grow, even with the right combination of sun, rain and good soil. It just grows. And, it's like a mustard seed which is not very impressive or powerful looking. The results, however, are wonderful.

This message is not an overly simple one that says "God will make everything the way we want it to be, and now." Each of us carries a sadness about something that did not work well in our life, and perhaps a number of things which are not working well now. Some of them are so difficult, so challenging, that it is hard to imagine how we could dare to have hope. We might be tempted to lose courage - to be dis-couraged - so much so that we can't imagine that God is here or that God is able to bring saving grace into our situation. We don't know - can't foresee - how there can be light anywhere near this darkness, or how this loss, this death, can result in some life.

We "walk by faith, not by sight" much of the time. That's why we call it "faith." Walking in "confidence" is walking "with faith." [Latin: *confidere* = to believe in] Today, for example, each of us can place our trust in God's presence with us, in the midst of the most difficult challenges.

We can say, "Lord, I know that you know more than I know or understand. I trust that you feel the pain I have and the pain that so many are carrying. I know you are sad about suffering. But, I place my trust in you, believing that you alone can redeem this mess with your love, mercy and grace. Knowing you are with me, gives me courage and hope. What I'm really asking you is to help me sense your presence with me and to believe. Like these readings help me to trust, that you have a power and a grace that we can't see or understand until we witness how you can give light, when we only see death. Please give me bold courage to sustain this faith and to witness it for others who need it from me. Then, like sun and rain and good soil, mercy and love will bring more life and growth than I can today imagine."

And, for some of us, this song, which often lifts up my heart, may help:

Chris Muglia's song "Our God Is Here" here performed by The Arch Street Band.

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