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St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM
Sermon, Proper 25B
October 25, 2021**

Readings at https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp25_RCL.html

*See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame, those with child and
those in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here. (Jeremiah 31)*

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, *
then were we like those who dream...
Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves. (Psalm 126)*

*Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man ... Then Jesus
said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10)*

[Also Last week: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and
said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he
said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"] (Mark 10)

Intro: (Psalm 126)

*1 When the Holy One restored the fortunes of Zion, *
then were we like those who dream.
2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, *
and our tongue with shouts of joy.
3 Then they said among the nations, *
"The Lord has done great things for them."
4 The Lord has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.*

*5 Restore our fortunes, O Lord, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.*

*6 Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.*

*7 Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.*

It's not often that we get to preach on a Psalm for a Sunday Eucharist, but today it seemed appropriate.

The Psalm appointed for today is Psalm 126.

Out of a total of 150 Psalms found in the bible, Psalm 126 is one of a special collection of 15 Psalms (a "tithe of biblical psalms" if you will) known together as the "Psalms of Ascent".

These are Psalms of Hope Rising, Songs of Expectation and Longing that the People of Israel sang as they anticipated their return home from Exile in Babylon.

These are Psalms of Praises Rising, 15 Songs of praise that the Levites sang as they climbed up the 15 steps to minister in the Temple.

These are Psalms of Hearts Rising, pilgrim songs that the People of God sang as they walked together towards Jerusalem for the annual festivals of Pesach (or Passover), Shavuot (or Pentecost), and Sukkot (or Booths).

We hear echoes of the psalm's celebration of homecoming and restoration in today's first lesson, in the Prophet Jeremiah's vivid description of the future God promises His Homesick People:

See, [says the Lord]

***I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here. (Jeremiah 31)***

I don't know about you, but I heard and saw and felt echoes of today's psalm's celebration of homecoming and restoration--I heard and saw and felt echoes of God's promised future, described by the prophet Jeremiah-- in last Sunday's celebration of

Holy Eucharist and the glorious blessing and dedication of our Cosmic Community Mosaic on the playground of St. Mark's Montessori School.

With nearly 150 people in attendance, it was by far the largest crowd of people gathered together to celebrate together at St. Mark's since the pandemic began in March 2020.

*When the Holy One restored the fortunes of St. Mark's
then were we like those who dream.*

*Then was our mouth filled with laughter, *
and our tongue with shouts of joy!*

*... The Lord has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.*

***... The Lord has done great things for us, *
and we are glad indeed.***

As much as I love today's Psalm, I'll admit I love today's Gospel, too.

Jesus and his disciples are traveling near Jericho, when a blind beggar approaches Jesus, begging for mercy. When he comes close to Jesus, Jesus asks him this question: **"What do you want me to do for you?"**

"What do you want me to do for you?"

This one simple question always strikes me as incredibly surprising. And incredibly important to understanding how Jesus chooses to work in the world. In the presence of a blind man, crying out for mercy, Jesus doesn't make an assumption about what the man needs. Jesus doesn't leap into action or get down to work. No. Jesus allows--actually, Jesus *requires*, the supplicant to *name exactly* what he longs for, to describe exactly what the "mercy" he is seeking might look like for him, to *ask directly* for what he needs and desires.

This insight about Jesus & the blind man isn't new to me. It's something I've been pondering for years.

But what I'd never noticed until midway through last week's service---is that Jesus asks the same question of the blind beggar in today's Gospel that Jesus asks of the Sons of Zebedee, James and John, in the Gospel passage that precedes it.

In last week's gospel, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, **"What is it you want me to do for you?"**

"What is it you want me to do for you?"

What do you want me to do for you? Jesus asks the blind beggar on the Road to Jericho
What is it you want me to do for you? Jesus asks the Sons of Zebedee on the Road to Jerusalem

It is the same question I believe Jesus asks all of us here today (in person at St. Marks, and gathered with us online.)

“What is it you want me to do for you?”

I believe we all long for healing, like the blind beggar.

I believe we all long for reassurance, and connection, and security and power, like James and John.

But, above all, I believe we all long for restoration, and homecoming, and an abundant harvest, like the countless pilgrims throughout the centuries all along the Way, who have prayed Psalm 126, as we do today:

*Restore our fortunes, O Lord, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.
Let Those who sowed with tears *
reap with songs of joy.
Let Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
come home again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.*

I believe this reflects the deepest longing of every human heart. In every time. In every place.

And yet, still, Jesus asks us: **“What is it you want me to do for you?”**

Today we symbolically “sow seeds” for a future harvest by offering our financial pledges to support the work of God at St. Mark’s in the coming year. **What is the harvest we are really hoping for** when we “sow the seeds” of our many and varied resources to support the work of God here at St. Mark’s? **What is it we want Jesus to do** with the gifts we offer? **What is it we want Jesus to do** with the seeds of hope, seeds of risk, seeds of trust, seeds of sacrifice, seeds of generosity, seeds of faithfulness, we are planting today?

As we come here today, sowing these seeds, Jesus stands here, today, asking: **What do you want me to do for you?**

Maybe we don’t answer the question directly, because it just seems so obvious
Like “Hello, I am blind! Isn’t it obvious that I want to see?”

What do you want me to do for you?

Maybe we don't answer the question, because we don't really know.

Well now's a good time to start figuring it out. Because the harvest we want determines which seeds we should sow.

If you want a harvest of love, you don't sow fear.

If you want a harvest of wheat, you don't sow beans.

What do you want me to do for you?

Maybe we don't answer the question, because we're afraid.

Well, now's a good time to take courage, my friends.

Now is the time to answer directly, with courage, when Jesus asks
"What do you want me to do for you?"

And now is the time to begin courageously, continually, sowing our seeds, and hope, and dream, and pray, and work, and wait together for the mysterious grace of God to rain down upon us, nourishing the seeds we've sown, even as they still remain invisible to us, hidden from our sight, nestled deep down in the so dark of the earth.

Now is the time to courageously, prayerfully, sow our seeds as we dream of the abundant harvest to come.

Now is the time to courageously, persistently sow our seeds as we keep walking together along the Pilgrim Way, in search of our Spiritual Home.

Now is the time to courageously, joyfully sow our seeds as we sing together and ascend to the Altar to make our sacred offering of thanks and praise.

Let us pray together, Psalm 127, BCP p. 782

1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, * then were we like those who dream.

2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, * and our tongue with shouts of joy.

3 Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

4 The LORD has done great things for us, * and we are glad indeed.

5 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, *
like the watercourses of the Negev.

6 Those who sowed with tears *
will reap with songs of joy.

7 Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, *
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.