

Ordinary B-30 & Liturgy of Remembrance
2018

Well, it's not quite November, but we need this autumn season to remind us that the natural cycle of life is not holding and keeping and clutching and dominating: it is losing, giving up, letting go, and letting be.

The natural cycle is change, growth, and expansion. Next spring the trees and shrubs and flowers in our yard will return, and return more luxurious and more abundant.

Death as the conclusion of human life is experienced and interpreted as disappearance and extinction. There is a primeval fear and instinctive human protest against the absurdity of death. But death is a greater, not lesser, communion with life; it is an expansion of being.

We say this because it is only in death that Jesus reveals to us the ultimate seriousness of the claims of God. God who was willing to let go of the only beloved one....and in the death of Jesus is the total self-commitment of a free and loving God. Love has no limits...Love expands to the breaking point and beyond---to crucifixion and on to resurrection. The breaking point, the end point that Jesus experienced was not death---but resurrection, rebirth, and renewal.

This liturgy, this day, this season is for remembering ...for holding in our hearts the promise of Easter life that only a few months ago we re-affirmed in the blessing and sprinkling of Easter water.

It is a for remembering those who have finished their part of the journey, have passed into the glorious dawn, and now walked with God

It is a day to remember those whom we have loved in this life - and the need to tell and retell their stories - stories of fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, lovers and friends and colleagues and classmates.

Their stories, and our own, connect us to a larger story - the story we tell as God's people. It is a story of liberation: a joyous, poetic proclamation of the prophet Jeremiah (who had his share of gloomy days) -the prophet sings of not a caravan, but a procession of exiles freed - and returning to Jerusalem- God gathering the remnant of Israel from the farthest corners of the world the blind, the lame, those who are laboring and birthing - and God leading them homeward by a smooth path to streams of water. Such is God's dream for the world.

The larger story to which we belong is also one of possibility and transformation: Consider Bartimaeus the blind beggar. There was a large noisy crowd. Bartimaeus hears it is Jesus. He begins to shout: Jesus, have pity on me. He would not be silenced. Jesus calls to him.

Baritmaeus sheds his cloak (the few worldly items he would have owned were in the pockets of that cloak). He jumps up and comes to Jesus. A blind beggar voices the deepest of all longings – echoing our own -- and boldly (and loudly we are told) says, “I want to see.” And Jesus, who does not need to touch the beggar to heal him – says “your faith has saved you.” And the beggar, transformed by the faith that has found its voice – follows Jesus up the road

There is something fearless in this persistent faith of Bartimaeus. We are witnessing the utter failure of a political and religious culture that does not want to *see*. Its toxic language is one of paranoia and scapegoating. It is loud and desires to silence us and it tempts us to surrender to our fears.

Henri Nouween said if we are *so* possessed by fear we “cannot *see* our inner most selves as an intimate place to come home to...we become strangers to ourselves.”

That intimate place within is the hospitable place – it is the space within where God dwells, where sometimes we struggle to find and embrace and celebrate ourselves, and where we are emboldened to extend the hospitality of God to all we know and meet

The prophet’s song of a liberating God and the beggar’s deep trust to be heard and made whole witness to God’s expansiveness.

So in the starkness of a fading autumn on the heels of a blustery and rainy nor’easter, we enter into the warmth of God’s gracious hospitality. We remember with love those who preceded us. We remember and keep close all those who work for change and transformation and share a common longing to be free and whole.