

A Sermon for 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

October 27, 2024



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[Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Job 42:1-6, 10-17, Mark 10:46- 52

Autumn Learnings

Autumn offers us many lessons about nature, life, and the turning of the seasons. Ed Hayes has a phrase in his autumn prayer that catches my attention every time I pray it:

“trees and plants acknowledge the death segment of their yearly cycle.” It is true, that the colors of fall are not only beautiful, but they are also a sign that the death of winter is coming, “the death segment of their yearly cycle.” It happens every year, and every year we have the opportunity to learn from autumn that this is natural, that even in the poignancy of this seasonal shift, there is beauty.

We have not been paying much attention to the story of Job, our Old Testament text, but here is the story succinctly: At the council of heaven, God and the council look down to earth and consider their servant Job, a good and upright man, for whom everything seems to be going well. Alas, there is a Joker in this deck of cards, who asks: Is Job good just because he has good fortune? What would happen if you changed his good fortune? They all agree to a trial run of the idea, and for the next 37 chapters, Job has terrible fortune and wonders if God has forsaken him. God finally appears before Job in Chapter 38 and tells him, basically, to shut up, for who is Job to question God? Then, today, we hear the conclusion: everything is restored to Job and he lives happily ever after. The real meat of this book is the 37 chapters when Job is in abject misery, with virtually no sympathy from his friends.

In a way, it is an autumn story. He had good fortune in the spring and summer of his life, but then came the real challenges of the fall and winter, when he wondered if his springtime would ever come again. It did, as it does for all of us, and we see it every year in the resurrection of Easter.

Our Gospel lesson is also interesting in this context of changing fortunes and changing seasons. As Jesus and his followers are leaving Jericho, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus calls out to him, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Bartimaeus being blind could not see Jesus, but he was told that Jesus was there, and he plaintively sought his attention. Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said, “My teacher, let me see again.” Bartimeus had not always been blind.

He had become blind and he wanted to see again. He no doubt remembered the landscape, perhaps the colors of fall, the faces of his friends, the good fortunes of his early life. He had lost the ability to see and appreciate all that, and he asked Jesus to heal him, to restore it to him. And Jesus complied. Bartimeus had to lose his sight to appreciate the gifts that his sight had brought him.

I always appreciate it when our scripture talks about sight and seeing. I assume this is not about the physical state of blindness, but about metaphorical blindness, sometimes voluntary. In our own lives, we may choose not to see some things. Sometimes it takes bravery to see, to acknowledge, what has happened. You were very brave, last Sunday, when you talked about the last 24 years of your history as a merged parish. You acknowledged that there were some difficulties with the merger – how could there not have been? – but ultimately the difficulties were overcome and you moved forward into your new unity. You were also able to identify later events that were challenging, especially during an interim period when you lost three-quarters of the parish. You could say it out loud and own the losses of that time. In the truth telling, you were able to see again, and to see the resilience of this parish, its strengths and its gifts. You could embrace all the experiences and move forward in faith.

It reminds me of a popular hymn you probably know. (And I promise not to end every sermon with a song!) If you know it, sing or hum along with this refrain that begins “Be not afraid”

Be not afraid.
I go before you always.
Come, follow me,
And I will give you rest.

Hymn 811, Wonder, Love and Praise, words by Bob Dufford, SJ, 1975, 1978.