



THE NEW SHOFAR

I cry, 'O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me,

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

Trinity 22

Sing aloud! Raise shouts! Proclaim! Say! Give praise!

These are the five imperatives found in our short text from Jeremiah and the beauty of them in the Hebrew is the way they could be placed on the lips of Israel or on God's own lips. Knowing the power of this particular prophet, it is likely he wanted his readers to keep both in mind. At the heart of his message is the verb *to save*. The exile that has destroyed the life and hope of God's people, that tore the nation apart, reduced the Temple and the Holy City Jerusalem to a pile of rubble was now coming to an end. Their sufferings were over - because God was intervening on their behalf, was *saving* them.

When Jerusalem was destroyed the Jewish people became fugitives, refugees, displaced people dragged from their homes by war, poverty and the desire for a better life for their families. They had been scattered, not just to Babylon but to lands across the Ancient East. Now, says God, a remnant of these people is to be brought home by an act of divine grace. Yahweh is not just seeking out the wealthy, the powerful, the successful and those who might be able to contribute to the rebuilding of the divine City. Note those being called home – *the weak, the vulnerable, the blind, the lame and those who are with child*. It is to these people power and legitimacy will be given. Those who have been devalued by the other nations are valued by God. This is why their song of joy and hope is now called for and why they are returning with joy and celebration. God values them, they are precious to him.

It is about the contrast between the ways of God and the ways of nations

Jeremiah is contrasting the ways of God with the ways of the Babylonians – with the Babylonians standing for all nations, groups and individuals are opposed to or indifferent to the saving plans of God. This is why this poem about the return from exile has the Hebrew people following the same route as that taken by the conquering army *from the north*. The differences and the consequences are enormous.

The invading army was fierce, destructive and frightening, almost like gods from an alternative world of darkness. Their deeds were devastating, disbursing death wherever they travelled. When they moved on they left behind a dead kingdom. The returning remnant of the Jews is led by the blind and the lame, it looked pathetically human and was undoubtedly weak. However, they carry with them the promise of new life and hope of something new for the future, a land of prosperity, joy and blessings.

God is the Father of the peoples of a whole new world

It must be noted, however, the way Jeremiah is not just speaking about the exiles in Babylon. He is addressing his message to all exiles, to people who had been scattered by the viciousness and evil of people everywhere. Here we have a universalist vision, one in which God is the hope of all peoples who find themselves in this kind of situation – the refugee, all peoples scattered by evil.

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The land to which these people are being gathered cannot be defined so easily by geographical barriers alone. They are gathered into God, invited to live under the Rule of God. Wherever there are people suffering from these same indignities and abuses, there God is at work. Within them is Yahweh to be found, there in their midst, offering freedom, liberation, joy, peace, wholeness and the opportunity for a new life one in which all are as one together under divine protection.

Do not miss the significance of Bartimaeus!

The narrative of blind man Bartimaeus is a carefully constructed healing story. It marks the moment when Jesus turns and makes his way up the winding road to Jerusalem where he will be crucified. Bartimaeus is said to have been sitting on the side of the road as Jesus was taking the same road and heading out of Jericho. One is *on the way* and the other is *beside the way*. For healing to take place the two must be joined together on the same way, for *health, healing and life* can only come via the Way that is the life, ministry, person and mission of Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God.

The blind man is doomed to his life of darkness as long as he remains *on the side of the road*. He is left subject to the whims and ways of the people of Jericho. They threw him a few alms, a bit of food and possibly some shelter but they did nothing to change his life. They left him blind and told him to shut up. There in his blindness he finally heard Jesus was in town but as soon as he hears that message we are told Jesus is leaving. His one hope of transformation for salvation and for life is leaving.

Bartimaeus cried out to God for mercy...

Mark keeps his earlier parable of the Sower in mind and here readers will remember the seeds sown on the path and how these *are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them*. This is the crowd trying to silence the cries of Bartimaeus as he pleads from his life of darkness and despair. As the world seeks to mute his cries for help...*Have mercy on me!* - Bartimaeus only goes on to cry out with a louder and more desperate voice. This is the voice heard by Jesus and Mark uses this struggle to highlight the broader situation of the Church in the world. The poor cannot be silenced.

Bartimaeus is the voice of all peoples finding themselves in the same situation explored by Jeremiah in the earlier reading – the poor, the powerless, the refugee, the outcast, all those *beside the road* of life who are left to survive on the few alms thrown their way by the comfortable world through which they pass looking for a home. They make their voices heard by God... *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing* (Psalm 6:2). Bartimaeus battles with the people of Jericho as he seeks the gift of life from this Jesus of Nazareth passing through their city. It represents the titanic battle being waged between Satan and God, the battle between good and evil, life and death, love and hate, those who have and those who have not. There he sits in darkness, on the side of the road, hearing rumours of liberation but with no one was ready and willing to bring him to the source of that life and healing.

To ignore the cries of those living on the edge is to be blind and deaf to God

The world prefers to ignore the sound and sight of the very people who are embraced by God, who are invited to live in his healing and loving embrace. They are best kept *on the side of the road*: in camps, hostels and tents, locked away on distant islands and in tent cities because they are threats to our comfortable way of living. It is easier for us to throw a few alms their way – as long as they remain quiet. The problem for Christians is how their voices reach up to heaven... *Be gracious to me, O LORD. See what I suffer from those who hate me...* and we are God's answer to their prayers.

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