

### 9.5.21 L23P15 Christ Gives a Taste of the New Creation

- Several weeks ago we were standing on top of a hill, looking across a narrow valley, to a rocky path on the other side
  - And it was hot... so very hot
  - You see we were in the desert wilderness outside of Jerusalem looking into the distance at the road going from Jerusalem down to Jericho
  - And let me tell you, it seemed like a God-forsaken place
  - The temperature was well over 100 degrees
  - Instead of the picturesque sand dunes that you see in the desert-scenes in the movies, this landscape was harsh, jagged rock as far as you could see
  - Below the rising waves of scalding heat, here and there from around the edges of the rocks, just a few blades of very hearty desert grass managed to survive and live
- That is what the places in the world look like when year after year there is almost no rain
- On the other hand, we all saw this past week what the world looks like when there is far too much rain
  - I'm just curious, how many people either had roof leaks or water in your basement or first floor?
  - And of course the scope of the flooding was very broad
  - Stoyer's dam overflowed, and Pine Grove and other nearby towns were at least partially flooded
  - Further away, two expressways in Philadelphia were under water, and partially flooded subways combined with a blackout to strand hundreds of people in New York
  - Almost a dozen tornados touched down in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and our daughter's brother-in-law who is a fireman was involved in several water rescues, and tragically also involved in one drowning and recovery
- This is what the world looks like when there is too much rain
- There is both desert and flood – too little and too much
- In today's reading from Isaiah, especially if we start reading just a few verses just before the beginning of our lesson, we hear not about too much or too little rain, *but we hear about just enough rain to turn even the harshest places in world around and make them bloom* [35:1-2, 7]

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,

the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus  
it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

- This image of just enough rain falling in the harsh desert to cause it bloom was an image of hope for ancient Israel
- This flower-filled desert was a vision of a future when God would replace the harshness of creation with a new garden of Eden
- This flower-filled desert was a prophetic promise that God would make all things new
- Giving hope, and giving a taste of the new Creation – this is also what Jesus was doing in today’s gospel, especially since the very same passage from our reading from Isaiah also says:  
[35:5-6]

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

- So first in the gospel, we heard that a woman left her daughter who was troubled by an unclean spirit at home, and she came and begged Jesus to heal the girl
- Then after an edgy conversation, Jesus healed her troubled daughter from a distance
- And then a man who could not hear or speak was brought to Jesus, and so Jesus took him aside, touched his tongue and ears, and prayed, “Be opened” – and his ears were opened so that he could hear, and his tongue was released so that he could speak
- Not only that, but both the daughter, and the man who could not hear or speak were not Jews – they were foreigners!
- The ministry of Jesus crossed the borders of his homeland to bring hope, and to bring a taste of God’s new creation to people beyond his clan, beyond the local

borders, and beyond the descendants of Abraham and Sarah into the wider world

- And of course finally, at the end of his earthly ministry, when he was crucified by a collaboration of both local Jewish leaders and the world-ruling Roman empire, Jesus opened his arms to all the people of the world
- Jesus Christ died, and his resurrection became the sign of hope and new creation for all humanity that had until then, been enslaved by sin and death... and that is the Good News that has been given to all his followers including us
- God's new creation that overcomes sin and death, that overcomes sickness and suffering, and also overcomes the harshness of a creation buffeted so often by too much, and at other times by too little – this new life-giving creation brings hope to us and to people of every clan and nation
- And now here we are after a week of flooding, after a week of refugees being flown out of Afghanistan, and after yet another week of pandemic
  - We need hope, and so many other people need even more hope
  - Let us give thanks for the blooming desert, let us give thanks for the promise that there will be a time when once again the deaf will hear and the lame will dance, and above all let us give thanks for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that offers forgiveness and life to all people
  - Let us share the prophetic vision of God's new creation, and also let us share our prayers, our work, and our money with people who are enduring a flood, fleeing a war-torn former homeland, and a seeking safety and health in a global pandemic
  - And let us share the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with anyone and everyone who have experienced far too much pain, and too little hope in their lives