

“Those who sowed with tears
will reap with songs of joy.” AMEN!

The Psalm 126 chanted this morning
is such a beautiful psalm.

It is so brief that sometimes we miss
the beauty of its simplicity, but it is
the bedrock of today’s message that
the Holy Spirit wants to be sure we hear.

One moment of life we’ll be like this...
and in another moment we will be like that.

Sometimes imprisoned and
other times liberated...

sometimes broken and
other times restored...

sometimes tired and
other times invigorated...

sometimes in tears and
other times filled with laughter.

What I long to know is this:
What happens in between the moments?

What happens that changes
imprisoned to liberated?

Tears to joy?

Tired to invigorated?

What is or what can be the catalyst
that changes one moment to the next? (Pause)

During a lunch break at the luxury
powerboat factory where I worked in
Largo, Fl years ago, a conversation,
with the men whom I worked with,
turned to God.

It wasn't something to be proud of
but something happened that
I hope I never forget.

We had decided that it was all rubbish
(to save you the more colorful word we used).

God and religion was "An opium of the people."
Someone said, quoting Karl Marx.

Something people in power created
to control other people.

Another said, “What kind of God could allow
the things that happen in the world
to innocent people?”

“How can God really be real?”

We were on a role, for sure.

And then one of the guys, Brian said.

“I don’t really know if there’s a God or
if there isn’t a God, but I want to leave
the door open a little in case God is real.”

By no means will I claim that we
all became believers with his interjection,
but we did all become quiet for sometime
in our measure of those words.

Something happened in between our
surety of a godless world that gave us
the possibility of a God-filled one. (Pause)

I would guess that most of you have
heard of the “Butterfly Effect.”

Popular culture has embraced the term
to emphasize the significance of

minute occurrences that can lead
to major ones.

In the movie, *Havana*, Robert Redford proclaims
that “a butterfly can flutter its wings over
a flower in China and cause a hurricane
in the Caribbean.”

Yet, in an article in the “American Scientist”
the author suggested that when
Edward Lorenz first posed the question:

Does the flap of a butterfly’s wings in Brazil
set off a tornado in Texas?

He did not intend it to literally mean that at all.

Instead, “The purpose of the provocative question
was to illustrate the idea that some
complex dynamic systems

exhibit unpredictable behaviors such that
small variances in the initial conditions could
have profound and widely divergent effects
on the system’s outcome.”

In other words, even though the universe
is deterministic and mechanical,
“a clockwork universe,” as

Sir Isaac Newton suggested,

it does not mean that if we could re-run life
from the beginning that everything would
turn out the same.

Even small variances would have profound effects.

No matter how many times I read this
it does not bring a surety to me about
the existence of God, but it reminds me
that the door is also not shut all of

the way because something happens in between
the deterministic and mechanical world that
is undefinable but still clear and still present.

And that might gives us a moment of pause. (Pause)

Turning back now to our
lessons assigned for today.

These texts usually fall on the Sunday that
we celebrate Reformation but
most of the time, pastors like me,
trade them out for the traditional
Reformation Sunday ones.

But, something has happened

(probably very explainable) to “allow” them
to be assigned today.

And I am thankful that something happened
because this story about Bartimaeus,
the texts from Jeremiah and Hebrews, and
the Psalm have the power to open
our eyes to the mysteries of

the in-between moments and reveal
how small variances have very profound effects. (Pause)

In Jeremiah we are given one of these pauses.

Our lesson today began with shouts of joy
and songs of praise.

These are unusual words in Jeremiah.

The book is called “one of the most
defeating, despondent and deprecating books
in the Bible,” by commentator
Elaine James.

We encounter a lot more woe than
we do joy in Jeremiah.

The people of God are scattered.

They were refugees and exiles
running/hiding/assimilating just to stay alive.

Forced to migrate away from their homes
and become strangers in strange lands
we find something change here in verses 7-9.

“What was once scattered is now
being brought back.”

A return home is forecasted; a promise was given.

The divine parent did not forget, and
comfort with hope for the future
is still present.

Let's read that verse 8 again:

“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.”

Something has happened.

This band of people, including those
with disabilities and vulnerabilities, are
a part of the great company.

It is not a threatening military or band of elite
people but the every day bodies of those
who are often excluded or judged inferior.

All these make up the great company, as is,
by a divine action.

Now, I call that divine because I have a lack
for a better word.

I am ok with just saying something happened
that brought brokenness to restoration. (Pause)

Yet, it is not just Pollyanna because we then read
how it was “with weeping that they shall come.”

It is not that suddenly everyone is happy/joyful.

They shall come while weeping.

Doesn't something happen to us when we cry?

There is a visual vulnerability and
a recognition of emotional fragility.

Maybe it is the most truly human thing we can do...
to weep in the presence of people.

Notice that it is not clear whether the weeping
will cease or not because marks of trauma
can persist even in the midst of compassion,
understanding and guidance.

And, tears can sometimes be so thick
that one also becomes unable to see.

And that truth walks us into our gospel lesson today.

Something happened in Jericho.

We don't know what it was specifically but
the Bible began by telling us

“They came to Jericho,” and upon leaving Jericho
“a blind beggar named Bartimaeus was sitting
by the roadside.”

Bartimaeus represents the lowest of the low;
the poorest among the poor was sitting
there along the way of Jesus.

This person existed in the liminal space;
he held a position on the boundary.

Outside the city, off the path,
separated from economy, unable to form
a family or work to sustain himself -

Bartimaeus according to the culture
was a nobody and this nobody “cried out.”

Today, our culture, would never call
a person born without
the ability to see worthless.

Nor would they be separated from the economy
or unable to form a family or lead
a prosperous life.

Today, our culture would not judge people
with different abilities like
they did to Bartimaeus,

but we also know we have a lot of
improvements to make.

Our avoidances, lack of accessibilities, and
superiority complexes have caused a lot of
tears to fall.

Yet, something is happening,
even today, to change that.

We need to understand that Bartimaeus
was already whole enough to follow Jesus
before he was healed of blindness.

We need to know that when Jesus said,
“Your faith has made you well,” he didn’t
mean that a person’s lack of faith causes
a disability in their body parts.

In the gospels, disabilities need fixing but in
the Hebrew Bible disabilities don’t need fixing.

In the Old Testament, people living with disabilities
are brought back into the community and
included and valued members of the remnant,

but something has to happen,
someone has to say something that gives
us pause and brings profound effects
to remember this truth. (Pause)

And so, even with so much more to talk about
I want us to focus on what Jesus asked.

He asked, Bartimaeus,
“What do you want me to do for you?”

It was not the first time he’d
asked such a question.

Last week, when James and John,
the able-bodied men of Jesus' inner circle,
came to Jesus, he asked them
the same question.

“What do you want me to do for you?”

There is no greater a distinction between
two people than what lies behind
the answer to that question.

So, what is it that you
want Jesus to do for you?

Elevate your status or to let you see again?

Your answer to Jesus' question should give
you pause because something happens
when each of us admit we are blind,
or deaf, and come to realize that
we are disabled in one way
or another.

Today, you may be sitting off the path,
outside the city, or just waiting along the way
and if you are... then a miracle is on the way.

(Pause)

This crowd, the community of believers at
St. Stephen will not quiet you or silence
your cries to Jesus.

In one of Martin Luther's most meaningful writings,
The Smalcald Articles, he writes about
the "means of grace."

The obvious ones are communion and baptism.

They are beautiful means of grace,
but there is another that we often forget.

The gathered community
is also a means of grace.

We have needed to negotiate that during
the times of COVID and we have done some
pretty creative ways but we never neglect

the meaningful connections that come from
sharing with one another our joys and our troubles.

Something important and miraculous happens
when we take time to visit with one another.

There are safe places to do
that right here on campus.

Benches by the fountain,
 swings at the playground, and benches
 by the about to be planted north garden.

Like Bartimaeus you belong.

Stand up, walk with Jesus and see
 how truly able you already are.

AMEN!