

Diane L. Neuls DeBlasio
Year B Proper 5
Second Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, June 07, 2015

St. James, St. James

Psalm 138
Mark 3:20-35

“On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul”.

It was a beautiful Spring day at the Bayard Cutting Arboretum. My children and I were enjoying the newly burst flowers, the azaleas and the rhododendron gardens at the south end of the park. After a while, we decided to head toward the north end of the arboretum, and visit the more rustic area called Paradise Island. We walked along the shaded dirt path next to the Connetquot River, sharing fond memories of snowy hikes on that Island, accessible by a small wooden foot bridge crossing the small stream feeding into the river. We looked forward to seeing the osprey nest, and if any of the babies had hatched yet.

As we rounded the bend, we looked across the estuary toward the footbridge. We could see a fence had been put up on the far side of the footbridge, the gate closed, blocking the way into the Island. A sign was on the gate, but we were still too far away to read what it said. I was annoyed, disappointed, and indignant that I would be blocked from going somewhere I had my heart set on going. The kids expressed their disappointment, too.

We decided to go read what was on the sign. As we walked, we complained to each other about the path being blocked, access denied us. We squinted and strained our eyes as we got closer to the sign but the print was too small to read. When we had gone near enough to see the top line clearly, we read: “Paradise Island Temporarily Closed”. Temporarily. That gave us some hope that one day the blocked path would be opened again to us. The rest of the sign contained words we never expected:

“Due to a recently built eagle’s nest, visible from the nearby river walk, Paradise Island will remain temporarily closed.” The message continued with an apology for any inconvenience.

This changed everything we were thinking about our path being blocked. A sense of amazement and excitement that eagles would be nesting here replaced the anger and disappointment. We retraced our steps back to the river walk, to where a photographer was placing a camera with a large zoom lens onto a tripod. We shared our excitement about the eagles and asked if he knew where the nest was. He said he did, and pointed in the direction of the nest. We thought it was the big one in the first pine tree, but he said that one belonged to the Osprey. We weren’t seeing the eagle nest. He aimed his camera toward the trees, took the photograph and then showed the image to us on the back of his camera. Now knowing what it was we were looking for, we were then able to spot the nest with our eyes in the bending branches at the top of the fifth pine tree in from the river.

It was an amazing site.

I had been so focused on the blocked path, looking for a sign, not getting what I thought I wanted, that I had almost missed seeing the blessing of the eagle's nest. The original intent of the walk to the Island was to see the Osprey Nest. In a way, I did see that nest, but saw much more than I had bargained for.

Sometime, when we ask God for something, it seems as if our path is blocked, and we don't get what it is we asked for.

Many times I have heard stories from friends who have been laid off from their job and then they found another one which turned out to be far more fulfilling.

They admitted they wouldn't had found this new job if they hadn't been laid off; they were far too comfortable, and too afraid, to change. The layoff, which at first seemed like a bad thing, turned out for the better.

At times when our path is blocked, either by personal or a family member's illness, the loss of a job, a financial setback, or yet another rejection letter, it's difficult to see the Holy Spirit at work.

Thanking God is probably one of the last things we want to do as we struggle.

Yet God is at work in these situations, in ways we can't comprehend or believe until later when we look back, or someone points us in another direction.

Sometimes, when our path is blocked, or a disaster happened, as we look at a flooded out home, burned forest, a town devastated by a tornado or earthquake, we sometimes look for a sign from God to find out why.

When I saw the blocked path on our walk at the arboretum, I wanted to know why.

I looked for that sign. In this case, I found one, at other times there's just a fence. We want an explanation. We want to know we haven't been abandoned by God. We want to know the Holy Spirit is at work, somehow, in all this mess. We need reassurance that something good can come of this.

In times of personal challenges it seems our path is blocked; we are unable to move forward. Our emotions may prevent us from seeing the Holy Spirit is at work.

Today's Gospel gives a glimpse at Jesus frustration with the scribes and even his own family when they fail to see the Holy Spirit at work; he's being compassionate to those hungry to hear of and to experience God's healing love.

Prior to returning home Jesus had been throughout Galilee, healing the sick, casting out demons, healing a paralytic, cleaning a man of leprosy, healing a withered hand.

When he had returned home, crowds were at his door, desperate for healing and to hear Jesus' teaching. The threatened scribes saw Jesus as being demon possessed; Jesus' his own family was coming to try to stop him. Jesus tries to rationalize with them, pointing out that he couldn't be Satan by the fact that he's casting out the demons.

The Psalm today recognizes God's presence in everything, and offers thanksgiving and praise for God's deliverance from exile.

Israel has been in exile for a long time. Throughout their exile, the people felt abandoned by God. The people had cried out to God, asking for forgiveness and for deliverance. Delivered, the Psalmist, looking back, recognized that God was indeed with them throughout their ordeal, he hadn't abandoned them, and the Lord had been working. The Psalmist offers Thanks with all his heart, for the lord's steadfast love and faithfulness, even the kings of the earth should offer this praise to the Lord of all.

God was called, he answered in His time, sometimes in a way completely unexpected.

As a Community of God, we hold each other up, walk with each other.

As we said this Psalm together we remind ourselves that yes, God is with us, always, even if we can't see the Holy Spirit at work.

We say it to give God thanks, always and with all our heart, for God's love for us, and faithfulness to us.

"On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul".