



Monday

December 28, 2020

Prepared for you by

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First Reading: Jeremiah 31:7-14

⁷Thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."

⁸See, 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.

⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."

¹¹For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again.

¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

¹⁴I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

In Jeremiah 31 the Lord says, "I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble." And right away you may see that this word of God is speaking not only about a geographical place over which exiles will return home, but also about a spiritual terrain over which each of our souls traverse. In that regard, this ancient word preached to people suffering in ancient Baghdad becomes contemporary to us. In that regard the promise of a path without stumbling is attractive today. Wouldn't that be great, to have God smooth the way into each of our futures? Nevertheless, there is something in the promise of a path of peace that we resist in our spiritual lives. There is something about the idea of being placed on a path, a straight path, one from which we ought not to wander that feels spiritually restricting, confining. Too often, we feel the confidence to set our own course. People make a big deal about finding their own way in life. We idolize trail-blazers, and dream of the road less taken. Therefore walking the straight and smooth path paradoxically is one of the hardest things to learn, even though it seems it is remarkably comforting, and strengthening.

When I hear the reading from Jeremiah for today, I hear echoes of other Biblical phrases, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want, he maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside still waters..." Or Psalm 119, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." Or the words of Jesus in many places where he commands "follow me." The effect of these passages is to say that God is the one in whom we trust, the one in whom we find strength, guidance, and identity. A favorite Bible teacher of mine used to say: "The Word works, but you have to work the Word." Meaning of course, you must read it, you must learn it, pray it, meditate on it. There is a hungering and a searching in the human heart. God, it seems, put it there. 'Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.' Question: But how to make sure we find our way to Thee? Answer: God has provided a path. The path is the Word. The Word is Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Rise up and follow!