

## **Proclaim the Truth of Christ**

**Ezekiel 17:22, 24: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says, ‘I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.’”**

God is tender towards God’s people – this is the message of the writer of the book of the Prophet Ezekiel in Today’s first reading. This is a very appropriate message on Father’s Day. Though we often think about God as Father we do not usually associate fatherhood and tenderness. In the literature dealing with male sexuality the focus is usually on the man as macho, violent and emotionally distant from those who are dear to him. In recent times, however, the focus is shifting to the male as a feeling, tender and caring being. Today’s reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel tells the story of God as a loving Father who cares for God’s people and God will do what it takes to care for and protect those whom God loves.

Our theme for today is ‘Proclaim the truth of Christ.’ The best way to proclaim this truth is to showcase a God who cares deeply for people to the extent that God will give God’s own life for the sake of all God’s people. This gift of God’s tender loving care is applicable not just to those who love and are obedient to

God but also to those who rebel against God. Today's reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel addresses both groups of people. Let's look first at what the prophet says about those who are obedient and faithful to God.

The word tender in the poem in Ezekiel chapter 17 is used to describe those who are obedient and faithful to God. Those who commit themselves to the service of God, like intentional disciples, are likened to the bud or shoot from a plant. The shoot is so fragile it is referred to as tender. In Hebrew, the word for tender can also mean delicate, soft or weak. Here one gets the sense that for the prophet Ezekiel God as Father approaches those who are faithful as fragile and soft because it is so easy to reject God and walk away from the faith. In other words, in Israel at that time at the time the prophet Ezekiel was writing, more and more people were turning their backs on God. It was easier to rebel against God than to remain faithful to God. Those who remained faithful to God therefore are treated with the utmost respect and care by God because it was very easy for them to turn their backs on God.

God's appeal to the faithful Israelites is similar to the words of the song writer, Will Thompson, in 'Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling.' Another hymn writer,

Ernest Emurian, tells a story about the well known evangelist Dwight Moody and the writer Will Thompson. According to Emurian, the world-renowned lay preacher, Dwight Lyman Moody, was on his deathbed in his Northfield Massachusetts home and Will Thompson made a special visit to inquire of his condition. The attending physician refused to allow Thompson into the room where Moody was lying on his death bed. Moody over heard them talking just outside the bedroom door. Recognizing Thompson's voice, he called for him to come to his bedside. Taking Thompson by the hand, the dying evangelist said, 'Will, I would rather have written "Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling" than anything I have been able to do in my whole life.'" In this sense, Moody affirmed the soft, loving and tender overture of God the Father towards all people and what better way to describe this approach by God than in the words:

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling  
Calling for you and for me  
See on the portals  
He's waiting and watching  
Watching for you and for me

Refrain:

Come home, come home;

you who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
calling, O sinner, come home!

Let's now look at what the prophet says about those who are rebellious against God. The metaphors used in the poem in Ezekiel 17 to describe those who are rebellious are high and green trees. Here the suggestion is that pride and selfishness drive people away from God. On the one hand, the high tree is the symbol of pride. Its correlate, the low tree, is the symbol of humility. On the other hand, the green tree is the symbol of selfishness. Its correlate is the dry tree which is the symbol of selflessness and self giving. Just as God takes pride in those who are selfless God is not impressed with those who thrive on their selfishness and their self sufficiency. The seed of rebellion against God is turning towards the self rather than turning towards God.

God will bring to ruin the ruling class is the message of the prophet Ezekiel. Those thriving on selfishness and self sufficiency forgot that their mandate was to serve the people as if they were serving God. Instead they were saying they were serving God while at the same time serving self and exploiting the people. A good example is in the general election in Barbados recently. The electorate reminded

the ruling party at the time that they hold the power in the final analysis. It seems the electorate had had enough of the former government and wanted to see the back of them so badly they did not even return one to the parliament. This is unprecedented in the Caribbean and could be a sign of what God does to the ruling class when it is too confident in its pride and selfishness. The ruling class may seem to flourish for a time but in the end God will work with the weak ones to overpower the strong ones.

Two things we can take away as lessons for intentional discipleship from the reading from the prophet Ezekiel today. First disciples are to be selfless. We live in a selfie world so it is easier for us to hear about selfishness rather than selflessness. Yet, it is in the realm of putting the cause of others before and above our own that a disciple, who is a follower of Jesus, is expected to live and practice. The practice of selfie is here to stay. People will turn the camera towards self and towards others as well. Selfless discipleship however is an invitation to turn the camera more towards others and commit to respond to their needs in soft and tender fashion

Second, disciples are to be humble. Humility allows us to turn the camera away from ourselves and towards others. In the final analysis this is what Jesus implies in the Gospel reading. Planting the seed of humility provides potential growth of healthy communities in which people care for each other. In the final analysis therefore selfishness and pride destroy communities. Selflessness and humility build communities and inspire us, as intentional disciples, to serve God in our service to others. In the name...