

Toward a Quiet Understanding

Jeremiah 31:27-34; II Timothy 3:14-4:5; Luke 18:1-8 ; Psalm 121 10-21-07

When I read the quotation from the prophet Jeremiah for this morning, one of my favorite scripture readings from the Hebrew Bible, I was reminded of a hymn—no surprise there. The hymn is “There’s A Quiet Understanding.” The words in part are these:

*There’s a quiet understanding
When we’re gathered in the Spirit,
It’s a promise that he gives us,
When we gather in his name.
And we know when we’re together
Sharing love and understanding
That our brothers and our sisters
Feel the oneness that he brings.*

Of course, this is a Christian hymn, but it ties in well with our reading. The quiet understanding sung of is the same thing as the nation Israel knowing God in its heart.

As is usual, we Christians take a look at this reading from Jeremiah and assume the New Covenant has been fulfilled in Jesus. This is known as “Christianizing” the Hebrew Bible—a thing we must exercise some caution in doing. When we indulge in finding Christ in every reading we can in the Hebrew Bible, we tend to scrap the meaning and environment of what was written in those pages and label it “old.” Then we tend to focus just on the New Testament feeling it is far superior to what went before. We forget that Jesus was grounded in the Law and the prophets. He was a Jew and he held the Hebrew Bible dear.

Jeremiah was pointing the way to better days when people would come to a quiet understanding of God and God’s will for them, a time when all would be restored and they would not live by laws on stone tablets alone, but by a knowledge that came from their hearts. This would be an evolution in the way people had perceived God. God would move from being an external being to one that dwells within.

Centuries later the author of the Second Letter to Timothy worked to promote the movement toward a quiet understanding as he encouraged those who were the bearers of the gospel to persist in their work through good times and bad and not to be discouraged by what it was they encountered in the world. All they would need they would find in the scriptures—those of the Hebrew Bible—there were no New Testament scriptures. The earliest writings in the New Testament are believed to be the letters of Paul that circulated among the churches.

There are times in our lives when it seems we come to quiet understandings. Something we may have struggled with comes into focus and resolves itself and we simply know a particular direction in life is right for us. And we yield to whatever it may be that we find written on our hearts. A knowledge that was there, within us, for all time, just waiting for us to discover it. And there is a wonderful peace.

This happened to me just about a week ago as I was driving from here to there. I was not even consciously thinking about a battle I had been having for quite a few years now. Probably about 8 or so. All of a sudden there was a peaceful quiet, understanding that the way things have been, they most likely will continue to be. That there is to be no winning or losing just a resolution within my soul that this is the way it is. This made me think of another song, from “Jesus Christ Superstar.” I certainly do date myself with these musical memories. The words to this one are:

*Try not to get worried
 Try not to turn on to
 Problems that upset you
 (oh) Don't you know
 Everything's alright
 Yes everything's fine
 And we want you to sleep well tonight
 Let the world turn without you tonight*

*Close your eyes
 Close your eyes
 And relax
 Think of nothing tonight.*

I didn't close my eyes and relax, that would not have been wise because I was driving along route 8. But, I did sleep peacefully that night knowing that no amount of wishing or trying or striving or struggling for a resolution would accomplish anything. Nothing could or would be gained by it. It is what it is.

As I continued to process this later in the week I wondered if this was less an awakening and more of a resignation to the situation. I have come to the conclusion, that it was an awakening, a steady dawn that brightened the corners of my thought process. Resignation to something for me, does not bring me the sense of peace I now have. A resignation might cause me a little anger and resentment. None of this is present for me. No, this was the real thing, a quiet understanding.

In our hectic lives we are so unsettled that we often do not allow ourselves time for thoughtful reflection on those lives and some of the knotty problems that fill them. This is sad. For very often, when we pull ourselves out of the game and sit with ourselves and with God on the sidelines we find solutions and answers we did not know existed within us. Doing this once in a while is a great exercise, but being persistent in taking a time out can work wonders for our spiritual as well as our physical lives.

Jesus was talking about persistence in the little parable he told in the gospel of Luke. Because the widow was so persistent in her approach to the judge to gain a fair settlement, the judge finally heard her. Jesus makes a comparison to God in the person of the judge. He told his disciples that, if they were as persistent in talking to God, as was the widow to the judge, they would be answered. They would have a new understanding of all that was going on and would find some peace. God loved them and always heard their prayers and would answer them.

Whether we call it prayer or meditation or contemplation does not matter. What matters is that regular attempts to reach within our hearts and souls and then reach out to God can lead us to a quiet understanding of ourselves, others and our Creator. It can lead us to a sense of peace that passes understanding. It can lead us to the sense that:

*Yes, everything's alright
 Everything's fine.
 Let the world turn without you tonight.*

Amen