

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lawyers do a lot of good for victims. They uncover injustice that others have missed. They reassure victims that someone is listening to them and believes them. Lawyers work a settlement that may not restore peace the way it was before, but will bring consolation that the truth has finally come to light.

Not every victim is so fortunate. Some have no one to plead their cause. Others are judged unjustly. Many of them have to find a different path to peace. Jesus himself is a classic example of someone who had no one come to his defense in an unjust trial and suffered mightily because of it.

Just before his arrest, Jesus finally entered Jerusalem, the destination of the journey he was taking for the last half of Luke's gospel. There, inside the Temple, knowing that shortly he was to suffer unjustly, he cautioned his followers that something similar would happen to them. Pointing to the Temple, he warns, "there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." Looking at the crowd, he alerts them of wars, "earthquakes, famines and plagues." And before those horrible things happen, Jesus says, they will be seized and persecuted, and some of them will be killed by their own friends and relatives. They will become victims without lawyers at their defense. Jesus promises no rescue, no settlements. Part of discipleship is receiving the hatred of others. He does say, "By your perseverance you will secure your lives," and "not a hair on your head will be destroyed," but it will come at a price of violence, calamity and hate.

You may have experienced this in some way: Your commitment to your faith has caused you embarrassment and ridicule. Your persistent prayers for someone's health have gone unanswered. Your reliance on God to preserve you from danger has gone unrewarded. It's as if Jesus was telling the crowd and us, "Look, I'm glad you're following me, but suffering is part of discipleship. It is normal. It is in your vocation."

So where do you find peace when everything goes wrong? When no attorney can rescue you from false judgment, what gives you peace? Jesus provides an answer in this passage. It is one that he followed during his trial. It is also an answer his disciples discovered when they were persecuted in the Book of Acts. The answer is one you're probably not imagining. Where do you find peace when everything goes wrong? Jesus says, your trial "will lead to your giving testimony." That will bring you peace. Adversity is opportunity. You'll be given a chance to say, "This is what I believe." God will even help you find the words on the spot. Your testimony may not change the people who cause your suffering, but it can change how you think about your suffering. You may realize that because you suffer, because you are a victim, you have a voice. If your persecutors do not pay attention, others will. Your voice, your testimony matters. It may not produce a just, material settlement, but it will bring you inner peace, and it will inspire people of conscience.

As we near the end of the church year and the end of Luke's Gospel, Jesus' warning about destruction reminds us that even if we do not get the results we want, we can give the testimony we believe. And for Jesus, that matters.

Sunday, November 17, 2019