

Joshua 3:7-17

Psalm 107:1-7,33-37

1 Thessalonians 3: 5-13

Matthew 23: 1-12,37-39

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## 2 November 2014 26th Sunday after Pentecost

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The orthodox and traditional understanding of the first reading (from Joshua) is that it is another chapter in the story of the people of Israel moving into the ‘promised land’.

And that is a fair and reasonable understanding as it was most probably written in order to validate that movement. We might also appreciate that these same texts that underscore the claim of Israel to the Promised Land still serve to shape the political geography and associated conflict today.

If this really is a reading that reflects the word of God, then with that orthodox understanding what sort of God does it speak of?

A God who only cares for one particular group or race of people; a God who will disposses every other race in favour of one, “his chosen”; is that the God we know?

Throughout history and across the globe various groups have sought to develop, promote and impose their own version of being a “promised people”. Alongside Israel, we have Nazi Germany with their Aryan version of ‘God’s chosen race’. And then alongside them we had the British Empire living under the delusion of a never-setting’ sun; they colonised and enslaved with Divine authority claiming any and all lands for themselves. Indigenous Australians have their own version of the same claim, spiritually supported in a dream time that underpins their own claim to land rights.

It seems that today’s Joshua narrative is a universal phenomenon that reaches back to the insecurities of primitive humanity; and the echo of “this is my cave and no one else’s” can still be heard as our parliament endlessly debates ‘stopping the boats’.

It seems that this narrative, this ancient story has been embraced by so many, and all seem to understand a divine origin that identifies only themselves as the chosen and promised ones. However, the narrative can only make sense, in reference to a Divine origin, when it is truly applied universally. In other words, when we read the text not about one particular group of people; Israelis, Germans, Brits, Indigenous Australians or non- Indigenous Australians; rather seeking in the text a universal truth for all peoples.

And so let’s have another look at the narrative.

The first verse in the reading provides us with some universal reminders; *“The Lord said to Joshua, “This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses.”*

The work of Moses and the prophetic enlightenment of Moses are not about “Moses”; rather they speak of an actualised Divine Blessing that goes beyond Moses, there is continuity.

It seems obvious, but in our modern world where the “I” is all important we can so easily lose sight of the “We”.

In this first verse there is a reminder that we each have a part to play in a bigger story than that of our own lives.

Joshua hears a Divine Word and a Word that we also need to hear; “*know that I will be with you as I was with Moses.*”

In Matthew 28 Jesus tells the disciples “*I am with you always, to the end of the age.*”

The first verse of the first reading is really as far as we need to go; for if we can contemplate all that is revealed in that verse, if we can find the “knowing” that Joshua found, then we will hear like the disciples heard, of a new way to live, and a new way of being.

The rest of the text can be explored as we would explore a dream, seeking meaning in the landscape and the movement, looking for echoes that resonate.

A movement to the edge of the water, what does the water’s edge signify? The Genesis account of creation has the waters as the chaos from which a new order is birthed, could this be a new starting point in the continuity of a journey.

Our life journey has a sense of continuity; it also holds the promise of new beginnings in every moment.

The crossing of the Jordan is another Exodus account, like the crossing of the Red sea; a movement through the waters on dry land, a path through the chaos, and a path through all that divides the here and now from the promise.

As we contemplate this dreamscape, listen to this well-known quote of George Bernard Shaw:

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

There is another sermon that links the first reading to the Gospel, and it is worth of some reflection.

In the first reading, the ‘priests’ play a particular role and the narrative concludes with: “*the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.*”

When we read through the gospel today we find Jesus speaking to both the crowds and the disciples and saying: “*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it*”; he does go on to then explore what integrity needs to be found within what is taught.

What is interesting for us in both of these texts is that they provide a reference point for ‘authority’; and so offer us an opportunity to be aware of the reference point(s) we chose to author our lives.

The drive of economic consumerism in our world promotes “you” as the primary reference point, and perhaps that is the source of most of today’s problems...

Be aware of the reference points you choose to author your life.