

Second Sunday Pentecost 7 June 2015

1 Samuel 8: 4-11, 16-20

Psalm 138

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Mark 3:20-35

The Old Testament story today narrates a turning point for the people of Israel; the elders of Israel want to change their system of government, they want to move from the system of divinely ordained judges to a monarchy; they want a king; and in verses 19 and 20 they give their reasoning: *"we are determined to have a king over us, 20 so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles."*

This story, like many Old Testament stories has both an historical relevance to the development of Israel as a nation; and also a universal relevance in that it narrates a common process.

The people of Nepal are still in the process of establishing a democracy to replace their previous monarchy and the writing of their constitution, which seems to be reported almost daily, provides another story for insights into the common and universal process that we read in 1 Samuel.

The Old Testament narrative also illustrates the process of 'turning points' for us, for each and for all, for it narrates the process of choosing for tomorrow; and that is a process that parallels the Divine activity of creation.

It is important to appreciate this is quite different from the activity of making choices in everyday moments; but the process that is being illustrated does underpin our ability to make choices.

One evening during evening prayer this week we read from Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

"Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God".

The first reading today asks us to consider where we place our sincerity, in what do we trust and that in turn enables us to consider how we choose to be governed in our lives. Are we guided *"by the grace of God"*; or do we give away our sincerity and follow the ways of consumerism, the worldly wisdom relating to success, power and wealth.

In the Old Testament narrative we notice that God does not step in to change the course of that is being sought, the people want a king, and a king is what they get; that is both daunting and affirming, we get what we want!

And one of the things we have in common with the elders of Israel, for it seems to be common to humanity; is that we do seem to want to be like others.

Worldly gravity as a physical force holds us together, and we seem to mirror that in our need to be like others, and in Australia that also means cutting off the tall poppies to keep things even and at the same level.

However we also have another seemingly common desire and that is an almost universal push toward overcoming the laws of gravity; it is well illustrated by the popularity of 'superman' who can do so much because he has the power to fly; and it is very much acknowledged in the language of this short extract from JFK's speech to congress back in 1961:

Finally, if we are to win the battle that is now going on around the world between freedom and tyranny, the dramatic achievements in space which occurred in recent weeks should have made clear to us all, as did the Sputnik in 1957, the impact of this adventure on the minds of men everywhere, who are attempting to make a determination of which road they should take.

Now it is time to take longer strides--time for a great new American enterprise--time for this nation to take a clearly leading role in space achievement, which in many ways may hold the key to our future on earth.

I believe we possess all the resources and talents necessary. But the facts of the matter are that we have never made the national decisions or marshaled the national resources required for such leadership.

I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth. No single space project in this period will be more impressive to mankind, or more important for the long-range exploration of space; and none will be so difficult or expensive to accomplish.

As we reflect on Israel's 'turning point'; we can readily bring to mind other turning points in history and especially those that were seemingly beyond the reach of expectation,

and that were very much against the grain of a gravity that pulls toward the sameness of a status quo and a desire, *"that we also may be like other nations"*.

And as we reflect even further, we might look within and discover the narratives of scripture and the processes they illuminate as our life narratives.

Surely we can all readily connect with the desires of the elders of Israel, and we too know the law of worldly gravity, we are so easily shaped as creatures of habit and still retain a herd like instinct for wanting to be like others; but we also have a glimpse of another reality that has been revealed through Christ.

That glimpse however has been distorted, Jesus was the one raised, the one like superman who defied worldly gravity; and his flock look adoringly from the grounded fields below.

However look again at what Paul writes in the second reading today:

"we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture"

"because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also"

"So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day."

The affirmation in today's readings is that we are creators of the turning points in our lives, and so too creators of the turning points in history; *"Indeed, this is our boast..... not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God"*.

Remember the reality of the first reading:

In the Old Testament narrative we notice that God does not step in to change the course of that is being sought, the people want a king, and a king is what they get; that is both daunting and affirming, we get what we want!

In the week ahead, and certainly as part of our preparation for the AGM a simple exercise; consider the 'arrow of life'; picture, even draw, a line representing your life and place an arrow head at one end; become aware of your life direction, and of our life direction as the 'Body of Christ'. To what does that arrow point?

Be mindful, as you trace along the length of that line, of the turning points that you have taken and also of the turning points you have missed, the moments of dreams, possibility, the leaps you never took, the flying you never did; we all have them.

Be mindful of how you have chosen to be governed, the authorities you defer to; identify where you have been bounded by gravitational forces.

Most arrows in the world point only to the grave, for that is the direction of worldly gravity.

Then consider the lives of those who knew *"the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also"*.

Those early disciples needed no retirement plans, they were not insured and they somehow were able to break free from the status quo; but that all changed after about 300 years when Constantine brought them all back into the fold of acceptance.

Today, the church is once again outside the norm, its lifeline when charted against worldly standards is heading for the grave; however that auspiciously brings us back to a pre-Constantinian experience, and an opportunity to course correct and create a new turning point.

"Do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day."

Return to your arrow and contemplate a future that looks beyond the grave, what dreams and possibilities are still to be realised as your *"inner nature is being renewed day by day."*

The unfolding of life revealed through Christ gives us an orientation away from the arrow of gravitation; and that takes us into a new realm;, the gospel narrative shows Jesus with a completely new understanding of family, unrestricted by the gravity of genetics and reaching beyond self to embrace all.

Finally, if we are to win the battle that is now going on around the world between freedom and tyranny,

Now it is time to take longer strides

which in many ways may hold the key to our future on earth.

And, like JFK: I believe we possess all the resources and talents necessary.