

9 Aug 2015 Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

2 Samuel 18: 5-33

Psalm 130

Ephesians 4: 25 – 5:2

John 6:35,41-51

[Proper 14B/Ordinary 11B/Pentecost 11 August 9, 2015](#) Textweek

The first reading gives us an abridged account of Absalom's death; it is a classic drama and could easily be mistaken for one of Shakespeare's plays.

The tragedy is already set in previous acts of the play and today we witness the final act. Father and son, David and Absalom, are at war; and in today's reading the final battle is played out.

The meaning of the text comes from the deliberate cameos that stand out; as we witness the slaughter of twenty thousand men we are drawn to the unusual account of Absalom's death and equally drawn to the haunting cry of David as receives news of Absalom's death.

The landscape of battle is the same setting used as a backdrop in the Hindu Scriptures, the Gita, which Gandhi referred to as his "spiritual dictionary"; and like the Gita, the first reading offers us also a 'spiritual dictionary' that we can refer to in order to seek meaning.

It is helpful to read the full account, the whole David and Absalom play, both to fully appreciate the final act and also to give ourselves time to be drawn into our own reflection of the story.

However, as we walk into the narrative, we begin to feel the truth(s) that this story illustrates; we can appreciate that wars forever pit father against son, for we are all of one Divine family.

However the conflict of war not only takes place outwardly between nations; the conflict between father and son, between parent and child is also an inner conflict within ourselves; a conflict between our different natures; an inner conflict perhaps between our divine selves and our human selves.

To fully realise our 'calling', to know the truth that we are "*beloved children*" of God engages us in a mighty conflict, perhaps even a slaughter!

Two aspects of our very being are brought into opposition, each faces the other and both are powerful forces on the battle ground of life. We are in a war zone, where fight and flight, fear and power take over the script of the drama. Like Absalom, we too find ourselves *"left hanging between heaven and earth"*.

The first reading gives us an account of humanity, and seeks to bring us into an awareness of ourselves; and it leaves us wondering at those forces that killed Absalom; *"ten young men, Joab's armour-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him."*

The commanders had earlier been ordered, *"Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom"*; the intent, even in the final act of the final battle, was for Absalom to have life; and following the battle, in light of apparent victory, the cry of David grieves that life; all that was hanging between heaven and earth, was extinguished.

Are we being asked to consider the 'ten young men', the forces that surround us as we hang between heaven and earth, forces ready to take us into death and rob us of the Divine desire, the desire of David for us?

The parallels with today's gospel reading are not obvious; however the teaching in the gospel gives us an invitation to contemplate again the place of Absalom but this time in the light revealed through Christ.

We found in the first reading an image of humanity hanging between heaven and earth; now in the gospel we hear; *"the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven.""*

Through the person of Jesus we have an opportunity to see another paradigm of life, life that is lived in a 'divine' perspective. And we already know the remaining acts played out in the gospel script, for although of divine origin, Jesus, like Absalom, will be found hanging on a tree between heaven and earth.

What we have in the gospel is a very different ending for Absalom was killed by the ten young men; and from that same place of in-between, Jesus finds life.

If, we can relate to this place, hanging between heaven and earth, we might also glimpse the possibilities that confront us; and so too might see these possibilities illuminated via Absalom and also through Christ.

In each and every act of communion we do in a symbolic action accept the invitation into that paradigm that gives life; we turn from the fate of Absalom toward the life of Christ.

We seek to consume and be consumed "*by the bread of life.*"

When Jesus says "*I am the living bread that came down from heaven, Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh*", he is not inviting us to a communion service, we are being invited into a paradigm of new life.

Paul gives us another translation of what this actually means and that concludes the second reading; "*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*"

The anguish of David is for a humanity that finds death from the place of 'in between'; the desire of David, and the revelation of Christ is toward life from that same place and that is accomplished in Paul's language with the simple call to "*be imitators of God*".

A piece by Oscar Romero posted to the discussion group this week gives us an appreciation of what Paul is saying;

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water the seeds already planted knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

In memory of Oscar Romero (1917-1980) posted by Gabby on the discussion group

When we find ourselves hanging between heaven and earth
When we consume the bread of communion
and when we are consumed by the desire of David

Let us be affirmed and encouraged by Paul's words; "*be imitators of God*".

Peter Humphris