

# Fourth Sunday of Pentecost 12 Jun 2016

[1 Kings 21: 1-21; Psalm 5: 1-7; Galatians 2:15-21 ; Luke 7:36-8:3](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 6C / Ordinary 11C / Pentecost +4 12 Jun, 2016](#) Textweek

A few weeks ago, on Trinity Sunday, we were reminded of the Trinitarian theology that evolved from the 1<sup>st</sup> century and that described a relative and relational dynamic between God and humanity; it provided and still provides an opportunity to move away from the static model of the earlier and more primitive understanding of God as a being set apart in heaven

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Einstein's theory of relativity transformed theoretical physics and astronomy and when first published, relativity superseded a 200-year-old theory of mechanics created primarily by Isaac Newton.

We're still discovering the implications of a world that unfolds in relative and relational terms rather than in more definite absolute terms; and the readings today serve as a good example to illustrate the relative nature, rather than the old fashioned absolute understanding of the bible.

In today's readings we have, from the Old Testament and the gospel, two very descriptive stories that are both emotionally charged and that also draw us into the process of judgement. The New Testament then provides an understanding from Paul that perhaps underlines for us the overall implications of a relational and relative theology.

So let's briefly explore the readings and become aware of our own position in relation to the stories.

In the first reading we hear of the real estate transactions conducted by King Ahab of Samaria, his wife Jezebel and Naboth the Jezreelite; and I wonder what conclusions you draw from an initial reading of the story; quite possibly you will be happy with Elijah's interruption and the judgement upon King Ahab who got his just desserts.

It is difficult for us to place ourselves directly into the story, for we are not kings, we do not conduct dishonest transactions for our own gain and no one has yet approached us from the royal family to purchase our home, yet alone our vineyard.

So let's take out these absolutes and look at the intentions or the desires that are being played out in the narrative.

Ahab represents a position of power and wealth; he actually makes Naboth a fair and reasonable offer, his only fault in the whole narrative is that he sulks when he doesn't get what he wants; can't relate to that at all, can we?

Jezebel, now there's a different story; but; on the plus side, she is actually looking after her husband's welfare, and although portrayed as employing a sly deception to get what she, or he, wants we might just hold off on our judgement for a moment.

Naboth, poor innocent Naboth, does nothing wrong at all and he's the one who dies. Poor innocent Naboth; hanging on to his family inheritance for dear life. Naboth who values possession over everything else, possession is more important than authority, more important than neighbours, more important than life itself. Naboth is perhaps an icon of primitive innocence.

When we look at these three aspects of humanity and their interrelationship, we might be able to see some of the complex dynamics at work in our lives, and even more so when we can acknowledge the relativity of power and wealth.

Alongside refugees we are as powerful and wealthy as King Ahab of Samaria, and when we explain to the world that we cannot take in any more refugees we employ the same sly deception as Jezebel. Likewise, when we seek to live quietly and peacefully within our own ancestral inheritance, we are as primitively innocent as Naboth, we live holding on to what we have to the point of death itself.

Elijah's judgement, portrayed as the very judgement of God again betrays a primitive understanding of God and the activity of the Divine; for only a primitive understanding could envisage a God of retribution, a God that would take one life in order to balance the books for a life taken.

And even if that were an accurate understanding of God, what do we expect for ourselves when we look at the hundreds and thousands who die looking for a safe place to live?

In the reading from Galatians we can see that Paul has moved beyond this primitive appreciation of the world and of God;

“we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ”;

Paul is saying 'we know that the Old testament narratives, the books of the Law, are not absolute, for we have seen an enlightenment revealed in and through Christ. And he goes on to more fully describe his new understanding and his new relativity in relation to the divine;

“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; 20 and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.”

We could of course continue to argue the legalities of the three persons in the first reading and also defend ourselves against the charges of Ahab, Jezebel and Naboth in ourselves.

And that serves to remind us that we can, and often do retain primitive view of God's rule in the world and our own alignment with it, absolutely.

However, the question illustrated today is, can we let go of those long-held absolutes and see again, in the enlightenment of relativity?

Can we reimagine life no longer described by God given absolutes, but life lived so inter-relational with God that we do in fact realise 'the word became flesh';

"it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me."

Perhaps the penny dropped for Paul when he contemplated the example of Christ in today's gospel, for once again it illustrates the living by the laws of life as they are, and their associated judgements contrasted with the example of Jesus, living "in Christ".

Simon, "one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him"; this is already illustrative of a big step. In the story the word Pharisee is used three times, in other words it is being underlined for us.

And here's the dictionary definition:

a member of an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law, and commonly held to have pretensions to superior sanctity.

Without being to brutal on ourselves, we might translate Pharisees as "your average church goer"; and that would also fit quite well with storyline as we also come together each week to share a meal in the presence of Christ.

The intrusion of "a woman in the city", a sinner, an outsider creates a crisis of law, a religious and social crisis. She has just entered the home of a Pharisee, and any Pharisee would consider her impure and unclean. Her presence contaminates the gathering. She has clearly crossed a significant social and religious boundary. From the Pharisee's point of view, she does not belong here; one can almost hear Simon crying 'we must stop the boats'.

The intimate actions, the relationship identified by the actions of both the woman and Jesus speak louder than any words of Simon and go beyond any reference to the established laws of life.

And Jesus asks a question of Simon, it is the opening of enlightenment and so too a question for us:

"he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

Relativity began in the 1<sup>st</sup> century with an understanding of the Trinity, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was formulated in another language  $e+mc^2$ .

Today we are invited into a new understanding with a simple question;  
"Do you see this woman?".

Peter Humphris