

# Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost 14 August 2016

[Jeremiah 1: 4-10; Psalm 71: 1-6; Hebrews 12: 18-29; Luke 13:10-17](#) from Vanderbilt

Proper 16C / Ordinary 21C / Pentecost +14 Aug 21, 2016 from Textweek



1. [Gipsy Woman with Child](#) 1908, Artist: Tihanyi, Lajos, 1885-1938 from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, Jean and Alexander Heard Library Vanderbilt University

2. [The Lion King](#) by erickenji Deviant Art

3. [Relief is coming](#)

[Luke Images Gotell Communications](#)

We would normally use the sermon to explore the three readings we have heard today, but for a change we might explore the three pictures that have been selected to go with the readings and see if pictures really do speak louder than words...

All these pictures, like the readings that they illustrate, reveal something about God and so also something about ourselves.

They are all quite different, and so immediately we are invited into different understandings of God and of humanity. There is no one picture that fully and definitively shows us God; no Christian picture, no Muslim picture and no other picture that provides a full and definitive illustration; and the same can be said of each of us and of us as a Church community.

There are however obvious differences when we compare the composition of each of the three pictures.

The first and the last pictures are composed of images of two people and the one in the middle is of a flaming lion; and that contrast alone is helpful in illuminating the contrasting understanding that is reflected in the text.

In the first and the last readings the Divine activity (what God does) is made manifest with the action of touch:

“Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth” and

“he laid his hands on her”.

It is perhaps to illustrate this action of ‘touch’ that these two images are composed of two people.

The second reading, illustrated by the lion is however quite contradictory to the other two in relation to that Divine touch:

“You have not come to something that can be touched” and “indeed our God is a consuming fire”.

Now rather than debate these ‘contradictions, of a touching God and of a consuming fire that cannot be touched, we might contemplate our own experience of God and perhaps we can then appreciate the rightness of both illustrations.

Now going even further, if we now consider the two images that reflect God’s ‘touch’ we can once again appreciate a contrast in the composition of the two illustrations which can again take us further into exploring our own appreciation of God.

The intimacy of the first image, which is titled *Gipsy Woman with Child [1908, Artist: Tihanyi, Lajos, 1885-1938]*, captures the very essence of the opening of the reading;

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” and it draws us into seeing ourselves held lovingly in the arms of the one who brought us to birth.

There is no hint of ‘original sin’, ‘the fall of humanity’ nor ‘the need for salvation’; for these are all primitive constructions introduced by the early Church and embedded in our tradition; likewise no hint that the rules and regulations of the Old Testament are necessary requirements for any to become one of God’s ‘chosen people’.

The image is universal (and maybe that’s captured in the woman being a gypsy) and seems to quite clearly reflect the embodiment of God as revealed in Christ. The mother gives of herself into the birth of the child; and so here we see an echo of the text:

“9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, “Now I have put my words in your mouth””;

the Divine word given, or birthed, into the mouth of humanity.

The other image reflecting God’s touch illuminates a very different dynamic; there is within its composition, a separation of the two characters; and we learn from the text “*12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over*”.

So here we might contemplate for ourselves the call and response that is associated with God’s touch; and consider the action, or movement, on our part that is very much part of the divine touch within this narrative.

The illustration actually shows us much more and gives us no hint that this is a story about Jesus the miraculous chiropractor. Rather, the image shows us two quite different orientations; one is bent, face to the ground and requiring a staff for support, the other is upright.

You might not see the background clearly, it is a simple representation of sky and land; heaven and earth, and the sky has vertical lines etched into it and the earth horizontal lines; as if to emphasise and draw us into a sense of orientation.

We see in this image beyond the literacy of the text, we see a story that is much more than a physical healing, and it invites us to contemplate our orientation. do we see ourselves face down to the earth, looking toward the place of burial, bent, almost weighed down; or do we find ourselves standing straight and aligned with the heavenly background?

Perhaps in this simple icon we might find a reminder of the overall orientation that Luke wrote into his gospel in an earlier chapter;

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” [Luke 4:18]

When we look at the image of the lion consumed in flame, we might consider the iconography of the lion;

“The lion has been an icon for humanity for thousands of years, appearing in cultures across Europe, Asia, and Africa. Despite incidents of attacks on humans, lions have enjoyed a positive depiction in culture as strong and noble. A common depiction is their representation as "king of the jungle" or "king of beasts"; hence, the lion has been a popular symbol of royalty and stateliness, as well as a symbol of bravery.”[Wikipedia]

Are we looking therefore at our most noble selves in this image, and like the surprise of Moses at the burning bush, do we also wonder at the fire that consumes and yet does not destroy.

Here we are invited into a new understanding of God that takes us beyond the all too familiar old man in the sky; here we are moved beyond a personification of a touching God and invited into the abstract and mystical contemplation of being consumed into the very fire of God.

Here is also illuminated the reality and the mystery of the Eucharist, our communion of thanksgiving whereby we give of ourselves into the fire of common humanity and receive for ourselves the very fire of God that is the promise of Pentecost.

The lion very much holds a sense of peace within the engulfing flames, almost inviting the fire to fully consume; here perhaps we see for ourselves those moments of Divine passion that enlighten us with a nobler sense of being; and here we see the moment of communion whereby we too feel the flame of the Spirit within and around us.

Three images that invite us to contemplate the Divine, to see ourselves birthed, touched, healed and consumed; three images that invite us to place ourselves into the picture and to find ourselves no longer bent over with our faces to the ground, but rather looking heavenward and becoming aware of life’s true passion, that which was

“Before I formed you in the womb”,  
and that which is when we look beyond the tomb.

Maybe we can let go of the text for

“the LORD said.... "Now I have put my words in your mouth””;  
maybe all we need to do is to paint ourselves into the pictures we’ve just looked at.

Peter Humphris