

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost 18 September 2016

[Jeremiah 8: 18- 9: 1; Psalm 79: 1-9; 1 Timothy 2: 1-10 ; Luke 16;1-13](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 20C / Ordinary 25C / Pentecost +18 Sep 18, 2016](#) from Textweek

The first impression from today's readings provide two quite valuable illustrations; they show us, or invite us into a true 'reading' of the bible, and so also they illustrate for us how 'the Church' has spoiled the whole process of bible reading.

If, and it is a big if, if, we can forget all that we know about the bible; put aside the baggage of bible reading, we can have an opportunity to more fully engage in a 'Divine dialogue'.

We have to put aside the fear we have of reading the bible 'correctly'; of not understanding it, we have to leave behind its special nature and also the fear of hearing God's word spoken to us. We have to let of of its boring dryness, and the names and place names that we've heard of but don't really have any real connection with; and also let go of so much that we think we already know or don't know; and perhaps then we can start again and start reading afresh.

Today's first reading is a good example for us to take a fresh look at bible reading.

"My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.....and my eyes a fountain of tears". We can read this short text from Jeremiah without any knowing; just read it, and allow it to resonate with wherever finds an echo within.

Prophetic laments, such as this one, did have a place and a context in the past; but that's past; they can also serve to provide enlightenment in the present.

If we take time to read the first reading, seeking to find that part of our own inner landscape, the place and time where our Joy is gone, where grief is upon us and where our heart is sick we will find that we're both revisiting our past and also becoming more aware of ourselves in the present.

In order to live in the world we employ many clever tricks to avoid, distract and deny so much of who we are; and yet the whole purpose and vocation of our faith is to bring us into our fullest reality of being.

We can never realise the oneness of God if we don't even know our own oneness of being.

And the delight of finding ourselves echoed in the bible, even if that echo is without joy, weighed down with grief and feeling sick at heart; the delight is that we are looking into a dialogue with God; and that same Word, the word of God is also to be found echoed in ourselves.

So when we sit with the first reading we can discover the place of our lamentation; and from that place within we can speak with, feel and embrace God; we can know that within us, alongside the lament is also the light that can illuminate our path to fullness and to glory.

Many of the psalms are so much like the prophetic lamentation of Jeremiah, and some are also delightful songs of Divine joy; and again these can be read as echoes of our inner landscape.

Now let's go to the second reading for that gives us another illustration that opens up the process of 'bible reading'.

Immediately this reading feels different, for rather than it being an inner dialogue with God as we had with Jeremiah, this is one person, Paul, writing to another; and once again it has a context of time and place located in the past.

So what does it say to us in the present?

Well looking at verse eight onwards, my guess is we will be less than impressed;

"I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; 9 also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, 10 but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God."

But, rather than deleting or writing off the text as 'old fashioned', we might stay with it a little longer and reflect on what it says about our understanding of the bible.

The religious right, conservative Christians and the likes of Donald trump still hold quite gender-separated views of humanity. Our parliament is still debating same-sex marriage, which is a quite different topic but still within the parameters of gender-differentiation.

When we recoil, rightly, from Paul's reading, we have an opportunity to discover a more enlightened truth, both in regard to this particular issue and to our whole understanding of the bible in general.

Many have read these and other similar texts and have been put off the bible, and put off their faith journey; today's secular world is very much a product of the Church hanging on to primitive understandings that have not been allowed to evolve.

Ironically, Paul was trying and wrestling himself with letting go of a past tradition in order to embrace the enlightenment of Christ.

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If we can capture and stay with Paul's vision and energy, we'll see he was trying to move into a new understanding, albeit restricted by his past tradition; and so again we find ourselves echoed in the very same process.

Here we are invited, like Paul, to look beyond our past traditions and to realise for ourselves that even today we are writing sacred texts and living sacred stories, we too are seeking to make manifest that which Christ revealed.

And so to the gospel, and enough about bible reading let's get on with the sermon....

And the obvious text from today's gospel is....

"You cannot serve God and wealth."

Regardless of how good, or not, your bible reading is; this is actually a text we all understand, and at the same time a text we somehow manage to evade.

And so rather than preach, and tell you what you already know... I'm just going to share a short story, from outside the bible, a story that illustrates the gospel for us in another way....

Growing Good Corn

There once was a farmer who grew award-winning corn. Each year he entered his corn in the state fair where it won a blue ribbon.

One year a newspaper reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew it. The reporter discovered that the farmer shared his seed corn with his neighbours.

"How can you afford to share your best seed corn with your neighbours when they are entering corn in competition with yours each year?" the reporter asked.

"Why sir," said the farmer, "didn't you know? The wind picks up pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If my neighbours grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbours grow good corn."

He is very much aware of the connectedness of life. His corn cannot improve unless his neighbour's corn also improves.

So it is with our lives. Those who choose to live in peace must help their neighbours to live in peace. Those who choose to live well must help others to live well, for the value of a life is measured by the lives it touches. And those who choose to be happy must help others to find happiness, for the welfare of each is bound up with the welfare of all.

The lesson for each of us is this: if we are to grow good corn, we must help our neighbours grow good corn.