

Pentecost, 4B, Refugee Sunday

Readings: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13, Psalm 20, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17, Mark 4:26-34

The Gospel: The Art of Restoration

Introduction

We human beings are delicate creatures. We bloom but we also break. We are, I suspect, always in the search for wholeness, looking for coherence, a sense of interior unity within ourselves and external unity with others. Another word for this is “integrity”: it comes from the Latin “integer” meaning an existential, inner sense of completeness. Where does the idea of restoration fit into the search for wholeness, coherence, completeness or integrity?

Restoration, as I see it, has to do with the acknowledgment of our brokenness as we search out, reach forward to our potential wholeness. Restoration then involves movement, steps forward, from being broken to becoming whole.

I want to think through with you this morning, this idea of restoration toward wholeness. I want to do it through the Scripture readings for today, beginning with some observations about the clip we have seen and then drawing some conclusions about what it means to “scatter, sow and harvest seed: the central metaphor in our Gospel.

Lion

So, first to the clip! The film *Lion* is a moving testimony to human restoration. A true story, it is about the journey to wholeness of Saroo Brierley, an orphan adopted by Sue and John Brierley of Hobart, Tasmania, in 1987. It is about Sue’s struggle to move from a shattered childhood marked by an alcoholic father, to a life of wholeness, through embracing a child, in fact two Indian children, whose own lives have atomized. It is also about Saroo, the first child adopted by Sue and John, and his own struggle to wholeness through resolving the wound of his lost-ness when an orphan in India, prior to his adoption in Australia: an experience that pursued him through his growing-up into adulthood. In the conversation, amid mutual tears, Sue reveals her restorative journey, and her sense of self that lies behind it; and Saroo overcomes his sense of guilt about burdening her, while he envisions his long-lost brother, Guddu, beginning what was to become his journey back to India to find his biological mother and sister. In the pain of their separate struggles for restoration, both Sue and Saroo find mutual support. This is a parable of restoration: from brokenness to wholeness.

The Readings

Let us now move to the readings for today. We need to read each of these texts – the Hebrew and the New Testament – through the lens of our thought of the last few weeks. Let us recall that the recurrent theme, has been the biblical idea of the Sabbath, central to which lies the commitment to psychological and social restoration, the healing of wounds. I have not spelt out to you, the initiatives set down in the Hebrew code of law that were designed to put Sabbath into action, but here they are: as listed in the Book of Deuteronomy, quite simply, *the remission of financial debts and the liberation of people who had become economically and legally enslaved: the redistribution of capital, so as to ensure the avoidance of social and economic inequality: and in a championing of the land, the leaving of broad areas fallow, so its fertility could be restored.*

In our Hebrew reading, this is exactly the point of King Saul’s destitution as king: he had failed and failed dramatically to maintain Sabbath balance within Hebrew society. It was to David, the most unimpressive son of Jesse, to whom the mantle would pass. In our Gospel reading, the stories are about the Kingdom and to what it is to be compared. For many

Christians this is a story about production of Christians, evangelization; but that is not the essential, basic meaning. This is a story first and foremost about the Kingdom, about evangelical restoration, renewal, and the building of the Sabbath, as *the* expression of the Kingdom in the here and now. It is about building and rebuilding systems: social, economic and political systems that are restorative in nature and character; systems that allow people to bloom rather than to break. Like the experience of Sue and Saroo, to restore is never easy, but then, to do the right is seldom easy, to build the Christian vision is seldom without reversal and resistance. To scatter, sow and harvest seed, kingdom seed, is exciting, but also extremely tough.

Today: Our Context

On Refugee Sunday, we find ourselves challenged with regard to a situation over which many Christians and many other Australians find themselves ill at ease. Charged by Jesus Christ to be vehicles of restoration of people, it has become increasingly difficult to turn a blind eye to the state's failing refugee policies, which while saving people from death by drowning at sea, impose a slow, brutal death in detention, while also eliminating benefits to those few who are on temporary visas on the mainland. It is hard *not to imagine* that these draconian policies are designed to dehumanize. But our difficulties are not limited to public policy. It is also the case that professional associations quite consciously and intentionally drag the chain for years when it comes to recognition of professionally qualified refugees who submit their documentation in good faith. You have already met the Iraqi refugee, Fadi, the dentist. Fadi still languishes waiting to complete exams which have taken more than 3 years to do. This continues to be the case not just for Fadi, but for thousands of professionally qualified Syrians who have been admitted as refugees into Australia, but effectively denied any path forward. Squeezed between government and closed-door professional organizations, the Christian Church's mission of restoration is more urgent than ever.

We human beings are delicate creatures. We bloom but we also break. The Christian mission of the kingdom is toward blooming, toward wholeness, toward restoration. Come with me on Friday evening as we work with Kur-ring-gai Council to be people who restore!