

Delighting in All People

Pentecost 2A, Sunday, June 14th, 2020

Readings: Genesis 18:1-15, Psalm 116: 1-2, 12-19, Romans 5:1-11, Matthew 9:35-10:8

Introduction

Home is where the heart is, home is the ground of our identity. Never more so than for Saroo: a young man whose identity and emotions are located in two homes: the first, in Hobart, where he came after adoption as an orphan 25 years ago; and another, a place he can barely remember, but all the same, to which he is tied back, in which he is grounded, as surely as he is in Australia. What stands out I think in this story, is Saroo's internal struggle: on the one hand, he desperately searches for home in Ganesh Talai. On the other, he is not sure what home is: it was all so long ago. The insight here is this: that home is not always a place that we know well, a context with which we are familiar. Yet it is a place for which we hope, for which we search, a sort of utopia, even though we have only the sketchiest idea of it. It is a place of joy, of delight.

The Reading

With that in mind, let's look to the Gospel reading for the day' It is Matthew's rendition of Jesus' sending out of the disciples for mission. What stands out in this account are three things: the first, is that there is a sense of home in this story, as there is right through the Gospels. It is, a home that has never been seen, never been experienced in its fullness, in its plenitude, but it is something of which we can conceive as human beings and Christians – life renewed, resurrection, or to use an earthier metaphor, the Kingdom of God.

Second, this home that has never been experienced in its fullness, but which can be conceived of, imagined, conceptualized: rests less upon words, less upon talking, and more upon doing. In other words, these followers of Jesus are to do what he has done: they are authorized to love, and that means, to restore those they see oppressed and suffering, to restore those made marginal by the religious, cultural, political and economic systems that encase their society. The emphasis then is upon walking the walk of kindness, dancing the dance of generosity.

The third point is this: that this movement of love and for love, is dramatic in that it makes no mention of vindication, of justifying the victims over and against the victimizers. There is no talk of what might seem appropriate, fair and just; a final settling of accounts with the oppressors, the exploiters. What catches the eye in this story, is something quite scandalous to our modern minds, grounded as we are in the language of rights: here there is no turning of the tables of history: of making the poor rich and the rich poor, the privileged diminished and the diminished privileged. Instead, there is a sense here of something else. What Jesus points us toward, is a utopia: a place where both good and evil may both participate at the

banquet. There is here, a forgiveness of the executioners, the persecutors, the weak, those who have lost their way: not because of any ethical commandment suspended from the heavens – we often reduce things to rules – but rather, and quite simply, *because all peoples are loved, all peoples are delighted in.*

In keeping with this joyful perspective, a few verses later – we have not read them today – there is talk of wolves and sheep. Do you remember those words? They are often taken to mean that Christians need to be cautious in their dealings: understanding what *really* makes people and systems tick: their dark motives, their perverse psychology – you know Nietzsche and Freud – they overwhelm us. The frequent take is that when push comes to shove, *most people are in fact wolves disguised as sheep.* The difficulty with such a reading is that we spend our time assuming most people *are in fact* wolves. We become tied to fear and defensiveness. The real biblical meaning, I think correlates with what we have read today: that Jesus spends his time, and invites us to spend our time, *creatively, joyfully, imagining wolves as sheep,* not sheep as wolves; loving joyfully, taking risks and doing stuff that people ordinarily don't dare to do.

Conclusion

To reach home then means to delight in all people. This week we reflect upon the reality of uprooted people, the reality of asylum seekers and refugees. My interest is not to harangue you about this, but rather to encourage you to see the conundrum of uprooted people through the Gospel lens of delighting in all people, as hard as that seems in a world that is currently in deconstruction.

Over more than 20 years or so of mandatory detention of asylum seekers, the result has been predictable. When you detain people, when you lock them up, you progressively come to a view about their dark, malevolent, hostile nature. It is as if the action of incarceration leads to the conclusion of their malevolence. Once perceived as such, punishment quite naturally follows – and then by force of law financial compensation for the abuse we have meted out. We are caught in this country: we have imprisoned people, casting them as wolves, but have become imprisoned ourselves, caged, trapped in our own mental and political constructs.

We have become the wolves in our very imagining that it is they.

Jesus' call to come home, to delight in all peoples, has much to recommend it.