



Sixth Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, July 21st, 2019

Dealing with Rivalry The Story of Mary and Martha



Dog in a Pew - Anonymous

Before the Bible talks about God, it talks about people, and perhaps the most significant biblical insight about human beings is that they are rivalrous. They fight not over their differences, but because they are the same and want the same things, especially those things that others envy. Moreover, not only are we rivalrous, in the sense of wanting what others want, but we actually copy each other's desires and behaviours, taking each other as a cue for what we want and how we behave. This great Biblical insight has been the great insight of the contemporary French Christian philosopher, Rene Girard, who used the term "mimesis" to explain it.

Now you may wonder why we have the photo above – a weird photo by any standards – with a dog in the church pew. Well, the explanation is quite simple and it pertains to the issue of human rivalry. Two very important and well-known German thinkers of the 19th century: the Christian theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, really detested each other, because of their rivalry in attracting the admiration and attention of German society. Schleiermacher insisted that faith has to do with a *feeling* of "absolute dependence" upon God. Hegel laughed scornfully at the idea, saying, it was *thought* that mattered, not feeling or emotion. His cutting response, which sought to humiliate Schleiermacher, has never been forgotten: if a feeling of absolute dependence on God were the mark of Christian faith, he said, then "a dog would make the best Christian".

Today, we continue our journey, with stories from the Gospel of Luke. We think through the story of Mary and Martha and their contentious, rivalrous relationship and what Jesus makes of it.

OUR GATHERING

Announcements

Welcome and Invocation

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
 The Lord be with you
And also with you

Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus ((TiS 203, St Elizabeth, Anon)

The Foundation of Rivalry: Our Anxiety

The spiritual tradition, especially in the Eastern church, has provided a mantra called the “Jesus Prayer” which people are encouraged to pray quietly to themselves during the day: it is designed to be repeated, in much the same way as the Catholic Church in the west has the “Hail Mary”. In its traditional form, it goes like this: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me”. In this opening prayer this morning, I have brought together, the Jesus Prayer, the thoughts of the American poet, Sylvia Plath, and the Christian thinker, Paul Tillich – both giants of the middle and late 20th century.

Lord God

I am so busy keeping my head above water
 that I scarcely know who I am, much less who anyone else is.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God

Doing all the little tricky things
 it takes to grow up, step by step,
 into an anxious and unsettling world,
 frightens me

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me

How do I accept the overwhelming number of things I can never know,
 places I can never go,
 and people I can never be?
 I am so terribly limited

Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me broken as I am

If I didn't think,

I would be so much happier

Lord Jesus Christ, help me say yes to you and yes to myself

God, how I ricochet between certainty and doubt

Lord Jesus Christ Son of God

The Peace

SMG

Introduction

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

A Way into the Readings: Observations about Rivalry

Our world is filled with competition, frenzied ambition in every domain. Each of us is acquainted with the spirit of competition. This spirit is not a bad thing in and of itself. Its influence has long been felt in personal relations within the dominant classes. Subsequently it spread throughout the whole of society, to the point that today it has more or less openly triumphed in every part of the world...No one, or almost no one, any longer thinks of forgoing rivalry, since it allows us to go on dreaming of a still more glittering and prosperous future than the recent past.

René Girard, *The One by Whom Scandal Comes*

Comedy is defiance. It's a snort of contempt in the face of fear and anxiety. And it's the laughter that allows hope to creep back on the inhale.

Will Durst

The 'courage to be', is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anxiety of doubt.

Paul Tillich

Like dogs in a wheel, birds in a cage, or squirrels in a chain, ambitious

men still climb and climb, with great labour, and incessant anxiety, but never reach the top.

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

Amos 8:1-12 (New International Version): A Basket of Ripe Fruit

Shirley Luttrell

We noted last week that Amos is known as one of the prophets with a great passion for social justice. Amos, a trader in animals and other agricultural produce, confronted the prosperous and peaceful society of the northern kingdom of Israel in the mid-700s B.C.E. The kingdom was ruled by Jeroboam II. In their power and prosperity the people of Israel assumed their privilege and affluence were evidence of God's blessings to them as the chosen people. Their religious observance was disconnected from their social ethics and bereft of social justice. This passage follows on from last week's reading, being the fourth of five visions given to Amos. It is the vision of "summer fruit." The Hebrew word *qayits* (related to summer or end of summer fruits) resonates with the word for "end," *qets*, implying that for Israel, the end is near. After Amos is shown the basket of ripe summer fruit, the Lord interprets its meaning through the play on similar sounding words in an oracle or pronouncement. "The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass them by." There are echoes of God's protection and presence in the Passover, now withdrawn because of the people's injustice. The predictive verses that follow the vision (vv. 3-5) are very dark; The words of warning are directed to those who "trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land." They are eager for the Sabbath to end, a time of religious observance and restraint from work, so that they may sell their wheat and cut corners in doing business with false scales. They are accused of "buying the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals," of turning people into commodities to be used.

8 This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit.² "What do you see, Amos?" he asked.

"A basket of ripe fruit," I answered.

Then the LORD said to me, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.

³ "In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "the songs in the temple will turn to wailing.^[a] Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!"

⁴ Hear this, you who trample the needy
and do away with the poor of the land,

⁵ saying,

"When will the New Moon be over
that we may sell grain,
and the Sabbath be ended
that we may market wheat?"—
skimping on the measure,

boosting the price
 and cheating with dishonest scales,
⁶ buying the poor with silver
 and the needy for a pair of sandals,
 selling even the sweepings with the wheat.
⁷ The LORD has sworn by himself, the Pride of Jacob: "I will never
 forget anything they have done.
⁸ "Will not the land tremble for this,
 and all who live in it mourn?
 The whole land will rise like the Nile;
 it will be stirred up and then sink
 like the river of Egypt.
⁹ "In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD,
 "I will make the sun go down at noon
 and darken the earth in broad daylight.
¹⁰ I will turn your religious festivals into mourning
 and all your singing into weeping.
 I will make all of you wear sackcloth
 and shave your heads.
 I will make that time like mourning for an only son
 and the end of it like a bitter day.
¹¹ "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign LORD,
 "when I will send a famine through the land—
 not a famine of food or a thirst for water,
 but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.
¹² People will stagger from sea to sea
 and wander from north to east,
 searching for the word of the LORD,
 but they will not find it.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Psalm 52:

Shirley Luttrell

For the director of music of the Temple. A *maskil* of David, when Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: "David has gone to the house of Ahimelek." A "maskil" is a piece that imparts wisdom

Psalm 52 is an appropriate choice to sit alongside the reading from Amos 8:1-12 this week. The prophet speaks of those who through deception and trickery gain benefit over others, especially the poor. The psalmist speaks directly to such people and of their ultimate downfall, just as Amos does. The psalm is directed by the faithful of the

Temple to those who boast of 'mischief' (better 'injustice', cf. Ps 50.19), love 'evil more than good and lying more than the truth' (v. 3), and seek refuge in things other than God (vv. 6-7).

The psalm fits the situation mentioned in the above superscription. The episode referred to is recorded in 1 Samuel 21-22. There we hear of the betrayal of the priest Ahimelech by Doeg, a servant of Saul. Ahimelech had supported David as he fled Saul.

- ¹ Why do you boast of evil, you mighty hero?
 Why do you boast all day long,
you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God?
- ² You who practice deceit,
 your tongue plots destruction;
it is like a sharpened razor.
- ³ You love evil rather than good,
falsehood rather than speaking the truth.^[c]
- ⁴ You love every harmful word,
you deceitful tongue!
- ⁵ Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin:
***He will snatch you up and pluck you from your tent;
 he will uproot you from the land of the living.***
- ⁶ The righteous will see and fear;
they will laugh at you, saying,
- ⁷ "Here now is the man
 who did not make God his stronghold
***but trusted in his great wealth
 and grew strong by destroying others!"***
- ⁸ But I am like an olive tree
 flourishing in the house of God;
***I trust in God's unfailing love
 for ever and ever.***
- ⁹ For what you have done I will always praise you
 in the presence of your faithful people.
***And I will hope in your name,
 for your name is good.***

Luke 10:38-42 (The Message)

Philip Southwell

This passage is wildly ambiguous. Is it giving Mary a male role and otherwise deprecating women's work, represented in Martha? Is it lauding Mary the submissive female and dismissing the caring Martha? Is it praising impracticality? Is it feminist in orientation, making space for Mary beyond women's traditional roles? Or is it the

opposite? To write more here would be to right too much, since the story itself is complicated. You may just have to listen to the homily.... :)

38-40 As they continued their travel, Jesus entered a village. A woman by the name of Martha welcomed him and made him feel quite at home. She had a sister, Mary, who sat before the Master, hanging on every word he said. But Martha was pulled away by all she had to do in the kitchen. Later, she stepped in, interrupting them. “Master, don’t you care that my sister has abandoned the kitchen to me? Tell her to lend me a hand.”

41-42 The Master said, “Martha, dear Martha, you’re fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing only is essential, and Mary has chosen it—it’s the main course, and won’t be taken from her.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Jesus Christ is waiting (TiS 665, Noël Nouvelet, John L. Bell)

A film-clip from “Gladiator” (30:08-33:49)

The film “Gladiator” released in 2000 purports to be a historical drama about Emperor Marcus Aurelius (Richard Harris) his son Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix) and the ‘4 star general’ Maximus Decimus Meridius (Russell Crowe). The film is more imagination than fact: Marcus Aurelius, while being the father of Commodus, did not die at Commodus’ hand, but from the plague. Nor did Commodus, really die at the hands of Maximus, but rather after ruling for 12 years – he was oppressive – died at the hands of his enemies. Maximus, never really existed, but does correlate to Claudius Pompeianus, a Syrian, who married Marcus Aurelius’ daughter Lucilla, and whom it is said, Marcus Aurelius preferred to succeed him over his son Commodus, but was turned down.

Notwithstanding the theatrical licence, the film offers many insights. Our clip, examines the rivalry between Commodus and his father, Marcus Aurelius. The emperor decides to pass-over Commodus, who had clearly expected to succeed his father. In the rage that follows, Commodus suffocates his father.

Some thoughts about rivalry and the Christian...

Let's Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Colin Bradford

**Closing Hymn: Make me a Channel of your Peace (TIS 607,
Channel of Peace, Sebastian Temple/Betty Pulkingham)**

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is life!

Through Christ

We are able to integrate, to see beyond our anxieties

We are able overcome our rivalrous natures

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

**Going Out: Shalom to You (TIS 778, Spanish melody, Elise
Shoemaker Eslinger)**

Musical Postlude

Organist:

Tony Ireland