



Third Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 24th, 2019

HIJACKED

Lent is a time when we focus upon Jesus, at his most human and vulnerable as the threat of crucifixion, at the command of the ‘powers’ of the state and religion, begins to confront him. It is also a time, when we concentrate upon the way things work in the world and what makes us human beings tick. Lent, read with critical insight, should shed light upon the character of God and the ways of history and humanity.

We began Lent with the account of the Temptations and then last week (Lent 2), focused upon the Psalm for the day. In the Story of the Temptations, we established that as all humans, Jesus suffered from a certain disorder, attracted and attached to power in its many forms. The Temptations are all about his struggle to creatively deal with the ‘promises’ and curses of the ‘big three’: the power of economics, politics and religion. Last Sunday, we continued the theme of “the powers”, as the Bible calls them. All readings, centred upon the particular power of nationalism and its complex and problematic relationship to religion and faith. In reading Psalm 27, we discovered that the king, first praises God with full confidence, in his nationalistic-patriotic agenda, but then graduates into a reflective prayer where he understands God might *not* automatically support him after all. Hebrew Biblical thought, and of course Jesus himself, were clear that nation and God must always be distinguished one from the other, not “joined at the hip”.

Today, we move onto the challenge of yet another ‘power’ in the Bible: “public religion”. Even in a secular age, theologies continue in the public mind, that are often dangerous.

OUR GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God our Father and Mother
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with

And also with you

Let's Sing: Sing of Colours (De Colores, New Century Hymnal 402, Mexican Folk Song, arr. Alfredo Morales)

Sing of colours,
 sing of colours that over the hills in profusion are springing;
 Sing of colours,
 of the birds that fly outside my window their canticles singing;
 Sing of colours,
 in the rainbow's bright colours God's promise of hope we recall:
 Sing of colours that make up the earth and give thanks to the God
 who created us all.
 Sing of colours that make up the earth and give thanks to the God
 who created us all.

Sing, rejoicing!
 Every creature that breathes raise a song to the God of creation!
 Sing rejoicing!
 Sing to God who so earnestly cares who has offered salvation.
 Sing the good news!
 Sing the love of the Saviour reflecting the colours of all.
 Many colours that shine from God's face,
 many colours that tell us God's love to recall.
 Many colours that shine from God's face,
 many colours that tell us God's love to recall.

De colores,
 de colores se visten en los campos de la primavera.
 De colores,
 de colores son los pajaritos que vienen de afuera.

De colores,
 de colores es el arco iris que vemos salir,
 Y por eso los grandes amores de muchos colores
 me gustan a mí,
 Y por eso los grandes amores de muchos colores
 me gustan a mí

Opening Prayers, Poem and Creed

In the light of the events in Christchurch, the imperative in contemporary societies is to assert the oneness of humanity: that we all swim together or sink together. The readings for today allude to this and to the danger of theologies that serve malevolent purpose: which we all harbour. Let us pray this poem together.

Human people
 children, women, men;
 created, according to one ancient tradition,
 from the dust of planet earth.
 Creatures of flesh,
 breathing air, touched by spirit;
 pulsing, blood filled, warm with life.
 Dust, not stone.

Together in our humanness.
Lives intertwined, connected,
 bound up with each other;
one.
 Your joys are my joys,
your loss I feel as my own,
 your pain and your anguish are mine.
My hope grows together with yours.

We have different names
that we use to describe
 the mystery and the source of our being,
but we know that no single understanding
 can ever be complete
or exhaust that mystery.
 We struggle together
striving after truth,
 leaning towards love;
always reaching.

We choose hope over fear
generosity ahead of greed,
 love before hatred.

Always love.

Always forgiveness,
always friendship;
 always we will strive to understand
so that we might build
 a future of compassion,
of justice and of peace.

We will put aside our hearts of stone,
our suspicious thoughts and our jealousies.

We will not speak words that lead to fear,
or hatred; nor will we listen to them.

We will trust ourselves to love.

Though selfishness and fear
 should surround us, they shall not prevail.

We will not despair,
 at least not for long;

we will take courage
 and walk upon uncertain paths
towards a future of hope.

We shall trust ourselves to love.

We are one.

Let me serve you,
 help you, encourage you,
embrace you.

We are one.

You are my sister, my brother
 my child, my parent,
my neighbour, and my friend;
I find my very self in you.

We will dance together,
we will sing, shout and chant.

We will work, walk,
build, cry and laugh.

We will pour ourselves out in an offering of love.

We will strive,
stand and struggle
together, defiantly;
knowing that none of us
can be fully alive
until we do.

We are one.

Amen

The Peace

SMG

Introduction

Lent Event: The experience of Maria in Timor Leste

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1juZkIHJVYttZOr2RNCEYceA5qiPwwDGy?sort=13&direction=a>

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Sayings about Hijacked Faith

The words from Second Isaiah are addressed to elite Israelites who had been forcibly deported to Babylon when Jerusalem had been destroyed. Even though they continued to long for their destroyed homes, these elites – and elites they were – also had learned to assimilate to the Babylonian empire - its thought and its ways. The entire reading today is about God's invitation for the elite Israelites to make a choice: *Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.* (v 3).

God implores the elite Israelites to recommit themselves to God's everlasting covenant, based in the event of the Exodus, for their

thoughts and their ways have been hijacked by the thoughts and ways of the Babylonians. By asking them to return home, God calls them to disassociate themselves from empire.

Fritz Wendt, “God’s Generous Invitation”, Isaiah 55.

In what Jesus says, there is a change from a god who is both good and bad, who loves and who punishes, to a perception of God who is only love, in whom there is no darkness at all. Consider Jesus’ teaching that God makes the sun to shine on good and bad alike, and causes the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust. This has the effect of removing God completely from the sphere of reference of our human morality, excluding him from any participation in judging and condemning humans. This is what we find scandalizing.

James Alison SJ, *Raising Abel*, p. 42-43

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

Ignatius of Loyola

Isaiah 55:1-9

Ron Wiley

This passage bursts with the excitement of an invitation to a banquet. It ends (vv. 12-13) with an unparalleled description of joy and peace. All that one needs to accept the invitation is a thirst. The magnificent poetry of the passage brings to life all kinds of scenes and images in our imagination. However, the background to the text reminds us of the very real problems addressed by the prophet. This chapter concludes the second part of the book of Isaiah (Second Isaiah, Isaiah 40-55). The people of Judah and Jerusalem have been in exile. They had been violently removed from their homeland by the Babylonians 40 years earlier. The prophet brings a word of hope of return. This hope is a fulfilment of God’s promise to the people. Earlier the prophet sought to comfort them with the message that their servitude was over (Isa 40:1-11). But people who have suffered badly do not embrace hope easily. In Isaiah 40 the prophet tried to convince the people that God was powerful enough to save, and had the will to do it. At the end of his message he again returns to the themes of human frailty and the utter reliability of God’s word (cf. Isa 40:6-8 with 55:8-11).

55 “Come, all you who are thirsty,
 come to the waters;
 and you who have no money,
 come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread,
 and your labour on what does not satisfy?
 Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
 and you will delight in the richest of fare.

³ Give ear and come to me;
 listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
 my faithful love promised to David.

⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
 a ruler and commander of the peoples.

⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not,
 and nations you do not know will come running to you,
 because of the LORD your God,
 the Holy One of Israel,
 for he has endowed you with splendour.”

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found;
 call on him while he is near.

⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways
 and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,
 and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
 neither are your ways my ways,”
 declares the LORD.

⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
 so are my ways higher than your ways
 and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Psalm 63

Ron Wiley

This short psalm, with its mixture of metaphors embracing thirst, joy, and rich feasts is a fitting companion text for Isaiah 55. The psalm contains many memorable statements of faith. It conveys a great sense of confidence and trust. However, one senses that difficulties giving rise to petitions for help are not far below the surface. The lectionary writers inadvertently hide that reality by designating only vv. 1-8 for

reading. That is understandable as those initial verses are quite comfortable. However, we cannot utter them without some awareness of the thoughts in vv. 9-11 which are less appealing.

¹ You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;

***I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.***

² I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.

³ Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.

⁴ I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

⁵ I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

⁶ On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.

⁷ Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ I cling to you;
your right hand upholds me.

1 Corinthians 10:1-18 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

This is a very strange passage, all the more so when we hear it read independent of its context. Basically, it is trying to rattle the self-confidence of the Corinthians by pointing out, through his discussion of the Exodus generation, that we cannot assume that all is well simply because we can look back to a wonderful past experience. Paul does not espouse the view: "once saved, always saved", because he sees salvation as something focused not on getting into heaven and escaping hell, but on a relationship with a person – Jesus – and people. That relationship is either intact and growing or it is not. The wedding does not guarantee the marriage. That's Paul's message here.

10 ¹⁻⁷ For I should like to remind you, my brothers, that our ancestors all had the experience of being guided by the cloud in the desert and of crossing the sea dry-shod. They were all, so to speak, "baptised" into Moses by these experiences. They all shared the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink (for they drank from the spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ). Yet in spite of all these wonderful experiences many of them failed to please

God, and left their bones in the desert. Now in these events our ancestors stand as examples to us, warning us not to crave after evil things as they did. Nor are you to worship false gods as they did. The scripture says, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.'

⁸⁻¹⁰ Neither should we give way to sexual immorality as did some of them, for we read that twenty-three thousand fell in a single day! Nor should we dare to exploit the goodness of God as some of them did, and fell victims to poisonous snakes. Nor yet must you curse the lot that God has appointed to you as they did, and met their end at the hand of the angel of death.

¹¹ Now these things which happened to our ancestors are illustrations of the way in which God works, and they were written down to be a warning to us who are the heirs of the ages which have gone before us.

¹² So let the man who feels sure of his standing today be careful that he does not fall tomorrow.

God still governs human experience

¹³ No temptation has come your way that is too hard for flesh and blood to bear. But God can be trusted not to allow you to suffer any temptation beyond your powers of endurance. He will see to it that every temptation has a way out, so that it will never be impossible for you to bear it.

We have great spiritual privileges: let us live up to them

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ The lesson we must learn, my brothers, is at all costs to avoid worshipping a false god. I am speaking to you as intelligent men: think over what I am saying.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a very sharing in the blood of Christ? When we break the bread do we not actually share in the body of Christ? The very fact that we all share one bread makes us all one body. Look at the Jews of our own day. Isn't there a fellowship between all those who eat the altar sacrifices?

The word of the Lord'

Thanks be to God

Luke 13:1-9 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

Jill McNamara

This passage is one that speaks of how faith and its discourse, theology, can be hijacked to serve particular purposes. In it, we hear how ordinary, faithful Jews come to Jesus, asking about the connection between sin and suffering. Tied to a particular view – common at the time – that suffering was due to a person’s or group’s sinfulness/ lack of respectability, and vice versa, this popular theology functioned as a *closed circular* mental/spiritual process, establishing a clear delineation between winners and losers. Faith and theology were the way to ensure you figured among the winners.

Here the story begins with an allusion to the death of some Galileans at the hands of Roman authoritarianism, and then moves onto the event of the collapse of the Tower of Siloam. Neither event is reported independently, although there is in Josephus the report of the Massacre at Mt Gerizim of Samaritans; and towers fell down all the time, leading to fatalities. The text then continues in reference to the image of the fig tree: a way of discounting the popular theological outlook and establishing the approach of Jesus, concerning the practice of forgiveness that breaks the self-righteous cycle: the constant danger of the religious mind-set.

13 ¹⁻⁵ It was just at this moment that some people came up to tell him the story of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with that of their own sacrifices. Jesus made this reply to them: “Are you thinking that these Galileans were worse sinners than any other men of Galilee because this happened to them? I assure you that is not so. You will all die just as miserable a death unless your hearts are changed! You remember those eighteen people who were killed at Siloam when the tower collapsed upon them? Are you imagining that they were worse offenders than any of the other people who lived in Jerusalem? I assure you they were not. You will all die as tragically unless your whole outlook is changed!”

And hints at God’s patience with the Jewish nation

⁶⁻⁹ Then he gave them this parable: “Once upon a time a man had a fig-tree growing in his garden, and when he came to look for the figs, he found none at all. So he said to his gardener, ‘Look, I have come expecting fruit on this fig-tree for three years running and never found any. Better cut it down. Why should it use up valuable space?’ And the gardener replied, ‘Master, don’t touch it this year till I have had a chance to dig round it and give it a bit of manure. Then, if it bears after that, it will be all right. But if it doesn’t, then you can cut it down.’”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Film Clip: Dead Man Walking

Released in 1995, directed by Tim Robbins, this film, a depiction of the experience of Sr. Helen Prejean CSJ (Sisters of St Joseph), is about the execution of Matthew Poncelet – the real person was Robert Lee Willie. In our clip, we see the real difficulty for Sr Helen (Susan Sarandon), as she seeks to attend to the victims' family – her name was Hope – while also agreeing to be Poncelet's spiritual support, prior to and at his execution. Unsurprisingly, Hope's parents, assume that Sr Helen has "seen the light" and has changed sides from Poncelet to them, as they demand "absolute justice": his life for that of their daughter's. In this clip, we see the way public Christianity differs from that of the believer, even and especially in such complex circumstances. We begin with the entrance of Emily, Hope's sister, and her introduction to Sr Helen. (48:46-52:14)

Hymn: Seek O seek the Lord (TiS 464, Venantius, James Phillip McAuley)

Some thoughts... about Religion and Faith

Let's Give

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

Jane Ann Tainsh

The one who prays ends each petition with the words, "May we wait, so to see more clearly". The response of the community, "So we may live more honestly".

Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,*

***as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
나라이 임하옵시며
뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
땅에서도 이루어지이다.
오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고
우리가 우리에게
죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이
우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
다만 악에서 구하옵소서
대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Song: In Christ alone my hope is found

(Words and music by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, copyright © 2001
Kingsway Thankyou Music)

“In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all—

Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
 Fullness of God in helpless babe!
 This gift of love and righteousness,
 Scorned by the ones He came to save.
 Till on that cross as Jesus died,
 The wrath of God was satisfied;
 For ev'ry sin on Him was laid—
 Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
 Light of the world by darkness slain;
 Then bursting forth in glorious day,
 Up from the grave He rose again!
 And as He stands in victory,
 Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;
 For I am His and He is mine—
 Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death—
 This is the pow'r of Christ in me;
 From life's first cry to final breath,
 Jesus commands my destiny.
 No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man,
 Can ever pluck me from His hand;
 Till He returns or calls me home—
 Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.

Blessing

May we wait, seeing everything with new eyes,
 May we discern the spirits within us and among us
 And channel our desire for *Christ's* purposes

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

Closing Musical Meditation: May the feet of God (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)

Closing Postlude

Pianist:

Rosemary Osborne