



NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY OCTOBER 11TH, 2020

THE AUTHORITY WITHIN SUFFERING: FEELING OUR WAY TOWARD GOD



These last weeks we have been thinking in different ways about authority, and in a sense behind that, examining the question, what makes authority legitimate or illegitimate. For Christian thought, authority while grounded in God, when pushed further, is ultimately grounded in God's essential character: grace. In short then, authority and its expression in the Biblical tradition are always associated with liberality, love for the common good, devotion to connectedness between human beings and between people and God. This is precisely what we have found in the recent Gospel readings through the stories of the Unforgiving Servant, the Story of the Generous Employer, the Story of the Two Sons, and the Story of the Wicked Tenants. Each story in its own way has underscored the idea of liberality.

Today in the story of the Wedding Banquet, we discover some twists, which while entertaining the idea of ethics, really turns upon the question of the connection between the exercise of authority and the spirituality necessary to ensure its gracious, generous and liberal application. Implied in the story is the correlative relationship between a right form of suffering and a right application of authority.

GATHERING

Announcements

We Prepare Ourselves: Bless the Lord my Soul (Taizé)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Svh-9ohg4&t=193s>

Invitation to Worship

In the name of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you

And also with you

We light the Paschal Candle

Hymn: Praise with joy (TiS 179, Praise with joy, John L Bell & Graham Maule)

Opening Prayers: “RSVP”

This prayer is an attempt to write about the human tendency to miss the point. This is no less the case in matters of life and faith. In fact, when we human beings turn to religious language, we frequently become exhaustingly pious, we click into another gear, detaching ourselves from the bald-faced realities of life: we flee to the so-called spiritual realm. What we forget is that the Bible and Christian faith speak about *this world* more than any other, that the Bible and the Christian faith are materialist in the deepest sense, bringing to bear a way of thinking that concerns itself about reality as it is and should be. This is what the Gospel reading of the Wedding Banquet is all about: the invitation to attend, to become an active part of the kingdom of God, which is not other-worldly, but very much this worldly. It is the kingdom that gives us a tangible sense of what following Jesus Christ is about. It is the kingdom that offers us criteria for testing whether our following of Jesus is more than just piety. It is the kingdom, for which, the wedding banquet is the primary metaphor that speaks to us of living justly and compassionately.

I thought I had it here a while ago,
the invitation to the wedding feast.
I'm busy, but I think I'd like to go.

Priorities have swamped me, as you know;
a banquet invitation's just the least.
I thought I had it here a while ago.

There has been included both the high and low,
which seems to me a rather foolish piece.

I'm busy, but I probably can go.

I'll bet this generous host would give out clothes
to all for whom good robes are out of reach.

I thought I read it here a while ago.

But I'll go as I am, thank you.

I'm fine, I've no need for any favours, for any saving grace.

I'm busy, but I think I'd like to go.

They'll tell me it's an honour.

I guess I could take my invited place.

I thought I had the invitation here a while ago.

I'm busy, but perhaps I'll try to show.

Amen

HEARING THE WORD

Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Relationship between Authority and Suffering

Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority."

Stanley Milgram, Obedience to Authority

"

Suffering is the substance of life and the root of personality, for it is only suffering that makes us persons. **Miguel de Unamuno**

You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world, that is something you are free to do and it accords with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could avoid.

Franz Kafka

God heals the sicknesses and the griefs by making the sicknesses and the griefs his suffering and his grief. In the image of the crucified

God the sick and dying can see themselves, because in them the crucified God recognizes himself. **Jürgen Moltmann**

Exodus 32:1-14: Do not return to Egypt! (Good News Translation)

Heather Lakiss

These last weeks we have heard several stories about Yahweh's faithful provision for his people as they continue their escape from Egyptian oppression. Today we discover that while Moses is otherwise engaged with Yahweh on the mountain top, the people become restless and decide they need to replace him for some other more tangible option. From this desire is created the "golden calf", the tangible sign of idolatry. This is a difficult reading, one that is often misunderstood. Frequently, the sin of idolatry is interpreted as being about the desire of these people to make of God something material or visible, as opposed to something spiritual or metaphysical. This is not the point of the story. Biblical authors of the Hebrew Bible often refer to God in very concrete ways, as if he has eyes, hands and feet. The issue here is much less philosophical and much more political. In turning against Moses and attempting to replace him with the golden calf, the people are rejecting the path of liberation that Yahweh sets before them. Their liberation is a gift, but also a task which they are required to take up and carry forward. These people want to return to their former state, refusing a God who would liberate them *from* slavery in favour of one who would live with them *in* their slavery.

32 When the people saw that Moses had not come down from the mountain but was staying there a long time, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "We do not know what has happened to this man Moses, who led us out of Egypt; so make us a god^[a] to lead us."

² Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold earrings which your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off their gold earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the earrings, melted them, poured the gold into a mould, and made a gold bull-calf.

The people said, "Israel, this is our god, who led us out of Egypt!"

⁵ Then Aaron built an altar in front of the gold bull-calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to honour the LORD." ⁶ Early the next morning they brought some animals to burn as sacrifices and others to eat as fellowship offerings. The people sat down to a feast, which turned into an orgy of drinking and sex.

⁷ The LORD said to Moses, "Hurry and go back down, because your people, whom you led out of Egypt, have sinned and rejected me.

⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They

have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

⁹“I have seen these people,” the LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

¹¹But Moses sought the favour of the LORD his God. “LORD,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” ¹⁴Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Psalm 106: 1-6, 19-23: a Song about Israel’s History of Brokenness (New International Version)

George Katsoolis

We have read parts of Psalm 105 on several recent Sundays. Today we read part of its companion Psalm 106. It is one of the few psalms where we have a clue within the Old Testament as to how the psalm was used in ancient Israel. 1 Chron 16:34-36 quotes Psalm 106:1, 47-48 in the context of the liturgical act associated with David bringing the ark into Jerusalem. Psalm 106, along with the other psalms quoted in 1 Chronicles 16, may have been used in some regular enthronement festival celebrating the kingship of the Lord. If so, this psalm celebrates that kingship by means of confession.

Verses 1-5 form the general introduction to the psalm before it focuses on the early history of Israel. The psalm is introduced with an injunction to praise the Lord and give thanks. Verses 2-3 express in positive terms the inexhaustible reasons for praise and the resultant happiness of those who observe justice and righteousness. The positive injunctions of these verses are then quickly transformed in vv. 4-5 with a plea for the Lord to remember the psalmist when the Lord helps the people.

The main body of the psalm (vv. 6-46) is introduced by a blunt statement picking up the discordant element in v. 4. In v. 6 the psalmist declares that both ‘we’, that is the

generation of the psalmist, and ‘our ancestors’ have sinned. The cause for the plea in v. 4 is qualified by a confession of sin but at the same time the psalmist joins the present generation’s sin to that of their forebears and prepares the way for the presentation of Israel’s history which follows.

¹ Praise the LORD.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

² ***Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD
or fully declare his praise?***

³ Blessed are those who act justly,
who always do what is right.

⁴ ***Remember me, LORD, when you show favour to your people,
come to my aid when you save them,***

⁵ that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may share in the joy of your nation
and join your inheritance in giving praise.

⁶ ***We have sinned, even as our ancestors did;
we have done wrong and acted wickedly.***

¹⁹ At Horeb they made a calf
and worshiped an idol cast from metal.

²⁰ ***They exchanged their glorious God
for an image of a bull, which eats grass.***

²¹ They forgot the God who saved them,
who had done great things in Egypt,

²² ***miracles in the land of Ham
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.***

²³ So he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
***stood in the breach before him
to keep his wrath from destroying them.***

Philippians 4:1-9: Copy Jesus, not each other! (Good News Translation)

We continue reading Paul’s communication to the Christian community in Philippi. In essence, the same themes follow from last week, the appeal Paul makes to his people not to copy each other in rivalry but to copy Christ, emptying themselves of their darker tendencies in favour of a life of integrity. He also speaks about the hallmarks of such living: joy and peace. Joy is not a mindless exercise which insists on living in a detached parallel world free of reality. Rather, the term refers to the presence of Christ amid our pain and our fear. Further, joy is also connected to relationships of openness and

receptivity. In like manner, peace does not refer to a disengaged serenity nor an over-worked system of thought that claims to have all the answers. Rather, peace is about the state of mind and heart that goes beyond the mere rational. It is about awareness of the presence of God, a sense of the Compassionate One.

4 So then, my friends, how dear you are to me and how I miss you! How happy you make me, and how proud I am of you!—this, dear friends, is how you should stand firm in your life in the Lord.

² Euodia and Syntyche, please, I beg you, try to agree as sisters in the Lord. ³ And you too, my faithful partner, I want you to help these women; for they have worked hard with me to spread the gospel, together with Clement and all my other fellow workers, whose names are in God's book of the living.

⁴ May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!

⁵ Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon. ⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. ⁷ And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.

⁸ In conclusion, my friends, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honourable. ⁹ Put into practice what you learned and received from me, both from my words and from my actions. And the God who gives us peace will be with you.

The word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Matthew 22:1-14: Authority understood and deepened in the light of suffering (The Message)

George Katsoolis

This is the third week of Gospel parables from Matthew about what the kingdom of God *is not like*. Additionally, this is the third week where the focus is upon authority. In a nutshell, this story is incredibly difficult to read, since it is enshrined in violence. If we read this story as it is frequently read, with the King taken to be God, then we run into all manner of problems, given 'God's' apparent violence. Modern scholarship increasingly interprets this parable in another way – as one of the '*anti-kingdom*' What stands out here is Jesus' insight and parody of the common understanding of authority with its habitual misuse and abuse, as depicted in the story. In this parable, Jesus connects the creative internalization of suffering as a means toward the creative use of authority.

22 ¹⁻³ Jesus responded by telling still more stories. “God’s kingdom,” he said, “is like a king who threw a wedding banquet for his son. He sent out servants to call in all the invited guests. And they wouldn’t come!

⁴ “He sent out another round of servants, instructing them to tell the guests, ‘Look, everything is on the table, the prime rib is ready for carving. Come to the feast!’

⁵⁻⁷ “They only shrugged their shoulders and went off, one to weed his garden, another to work in his shop. The rest, with nothing better to do, beat up on the messengers and then killed them. The king was outraged and sent his soldiers to destroy those thugs and level their city.

⁸⁻¹⁰ “Then he told his servants, ‘We have a wedding banquet all prepared but no guests. The ones I invited weren’t up to it. Go out into the busiest intersections in town and invite anyone you find to the banquet.’ The servants went out on the streets and rounded up everyone they laid eyes on, good and bad, regardless. And so the banquet was on—every place filled.

¹¹⁻¹³ “When the king entered and looked over the scene, he spotted a man who wasn’t properly dressed. He said to him, ‘Friend, how dare you come in here looking like that!’ The man was speechless. Then the king told his servants, ‘Get him out of here—fast. Tie him up and ship him to hell. And make sure he doesn’t get back in.’

¹⁴ “That’s what I mean when I say, ‘Many get invited; only a few make it.’”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ

Song: Lift up your hearts unto the Lord (TiS 732, Sing Alleluia, Linda Stassen-Benjamin)

Film Clip

This film “Missing” is the story of the disappearance and execution of the American citizen, Charles Horman (John Shea) within days of the military coup of the former Chilean dictator, Augusto Pinochet. It is a real and moving story about, Charles’ father, Ed Horman’s (Jack Lemmon’s) search for his son, penetrating the lies of the US Embassy, and ultimately the US Government, whose own security agency, the CIA,

gave the “kill order”. On the other side of the coin, the story is a moving account of a son’s wholesome and honest aspirations for social justice in his work as a journalist, in a murky world of what became unfettered violence. In this scene we see Ed, Charles’ father, a devout Christian Scientist, searching to piece together the truth and find his son. First, we see the interaction between Ed and his daughter-in-law, Beth as they talk about Charles’ optimism and idealism: something Ed sees as naïve. Then we see Ed interviewing a neighbour about Charles’ disappearance, his kidnapping by the military, and his imprisonment in the National Stadium, where he ultimately lost his life. (Missing, Costa Gavras, 48:36-53:13)

Some Thoughts: The Authority within Suffering

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

Annette Burne

At the end of each prayer/petition with the words, ***Lord Christ, hear our prayers*** we say, ***“May we use our suffering to live creatively”***

The Lord’s Prayer “Baba Yetu, Stellenbosch University Choir, Capetown, South Africa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCa8RxaOPW8>

Closing Hymn: I the Lord (TiS 658, Here I am Lord, Daniel Schutte)

Blessing and Sending Out

The blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
Be upon you and remain with you always

Our service has ended.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

May the Feet of God (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)

Musical Postlude

Organist:

Jim Abraham



Anita González 1925-2018