

11 August 2024

A Reflection

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O LORD HEAR MY PRAYER

Readings:

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33; Psalm 130; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

Recently, I've been watching an Australian drama series called, 'Love Me'. I happened to turn our TV on a Tuesday night after a parish council meeting (which thankfully, finished early) and there was the show, "Love Me".

Episode one of 'Love Me' involved a professional family of four: A father in his late sixties, married to his disabled, depressed wife. Two adult children, one a female doctor working at the local hospital and an adult son, still doing study towards a law degree.

What is fascinating about the series is the dysfunctional relationships between all four, despite the real effort each one makes to express love for the others. That saying, 'Talking past each other' sums up their communication.

Somewhere along the line, the communication has broken down and they all choose to live in their own little corners of the world, coming together only when necessary. The brow-beaten husband is with his disabled wife almost 24/7. And there's the suggestion that he was responsible for the car accident which left her disabled. He is therefore guilt-ridden and makes himself available for his wife's every whim.

The four family members gather at the parents' house to celebrate their parents' wedding anniversary, and pretty soon the conversation breaks down. The disabled mother asks to be taken back to the bedroom and the son and daughter find themselves with nothing to talk about. Their attempt at conversation ends in a swearing match and both depart to go their separate ways.

Each person is a good person in their own right. They all mean well, but they just don't go well together. Their relationship is marked by an awkwardness that I believe is more common than we like to think.

The story is the story of different kinds of love. Physical love; emotional love, family love, or the lack of it. Love that fills the gap of loneliness. Learning to love oneself and learning to love others without exploiting them. It is about love gone wrong.

When I read the stories of David in First and Second Samuel, I could see that same awkwardness and 'misplaced love' if we could call it that. Awkwardness between family members. Awkwardness in their relationships to one another, awkwardness because of

their family history. In a very real way, the David stories mirror the awkwardness in lot of our families and a lot of lives.

Our first reading today follows David's fortunes.

David is at war with his own son Absalom. Absalom has killed his older brother Amnon, over the rape of Absalom's full sister Tamar. Amnon was to have been David's successor.

Before the battle with the rebel forces of Absalom, David asks his generals, Joab, Ittai and Abishai to spare the life of Absalom, if they happen to capture him.

Joab captures Absalom, whose head has become lodged in the branches of an oak tree, his legs dangling down. Still alive but helpless. Joab and his armour bearers do what soldiers do. They kill their enemy (their master's enemy) in a frenzied attack and show no mercy.

When David hears of the death of Absalom, he immediately starts grieving, with his famous song:

'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'

The natural cry of a parent who loves his child and doesn't want to see them suffer. Maybe you've been in that place where a child or grandchild is suffering, and you wish you could take their place.

David doesn't, however, grieve over the other 20,000 of his own soldiers, sons of Israel, who have died in the battle with Absalom. He expresses no grief for them and no empathy for their families.

We also remember the awkward relationship with Bathsheba, where, in an earlier battle, David ordered his troops to place Bathsheba's husband Uriah, in the frontline, causing his death. David then stole and raped Uriah's wife Bathsheba, adding her to his harem.

It's a story about awkward relationships, the abuse of power. The rage of war and the power to destroy one's enemies.

And it is a story of love-gone-wrong. It's a story about being human and failing to be human. Love that never reaches its destination.

It is also about God's contrasting love, which is for each and for all.

David's prayers and his psalms show us a different David. A man who is not in control. A man who begs for the mercy of God. Psalm 130:

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² *Lord, hear my voice!*

⁵ *I wait for the LORD; my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;*

⁶ *my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.*

These are not the words of a confident, entitled, man. They are the prayers of a desperate person, aware of his own weakness and aware of his own need for redemption.

One of the strengths of the old Hebrew Stories is that they don't gloss over the faults of their heroes. David is held to account by the prophets Samuel and Nathan. He suffers as a consequence of his own wrong doings.

The baby born to David and Bathsheba dies.

David is pursued by his own son Absalom and is never secure on his throne.

He is forbidden to build the Temple because he is known as 'A Man of Blood'.

His life is anything but a dream and is held up as an example of what 'not' to do.

Our second reading from Ephesians is quite straight forward and was written a thousand years after First and Second Samuel and the stories of David.

Paul's Letter is written to new Christians, about Rules for The New Life in Christ.

Rules For New Life could also apply to all sorts of new beginnings.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 is often used for pre-marriage preparation, or pre-marriage counselling.

It is still good advice for all households. Small or large. Like the Australian family I mentioned in the series, "Love Me".

Put away all falsehood.

Speak only the truth.

Be angry but sin not.

Don't let the sun go down on your anger.

Don't make room for the devil.

Let no evil talk come out of your mouth.

Build one another up and give grace to the other.

Don't grieve the Holy Spirit.

Put away bitterness, anger, slander, malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven you. Be imitators of God.

What a great set of house rules.

Finally, our gospel lesson continues the theme of the Bread of Life which we focused on last week. Christ is the Goodness of life, the wairua, and the substance of life. That we cannot live without.

To Christ be the Glory in this life and in the life to come.

PRAYER

Grant to us, O God, we pray,
the spirit to always think and do what is right,
that we, who cannot exist without you,
may be able to live according to your will;
through Jesus Christ
who is alive with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.