

TRINITY NEWS

Pentecost 13 Matthew 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant at Matthew 18:23-35 is part of the set Gospel for today. To repeat some notes from last week: “The parable of the unforgiving servant is about the servant who is forgiven a huge debt by his master instead of drastic consequences. The same servant then goes out and ill-treats another servant who owes him a debt, throwing him into prison and treating his family cruelly.”

Today we remember the events of September 11 in 2001. I was in India at the time teaching at a Bible College at Nasik, Maharashtra. The Indians had experienced extremists bombing Mumbai and other places. We say “extremists” because we cannot contemplate anyone doing such things bereft of any trace of compassion. But we all have moments of interior violence and it shows sometimes in our demeanour and in our words and sometimes our acts. But to actually put into practice the matter of killing another person or many others without any regard for their lives or families or history or their right to have a life on this earth requires a shutting down of any concept of compassion. This shutting down actually destroys our humanity. That is, it takes away something that gives us our essential shape as a human person. It makes one form of ‘integrity’, revenge, the basis for the total conduct of a person in a particular situation. We may call this “ideological attraction”. That is, our ownership of a particular set of ideas, usually grounded in provoked or non-provoked hatred, that colours every aspect of our thinking. It becomes our essential worldview and then we are unable to allow anything in that might overshadow or diminish that particular field of vision. Compassion is seen as weakness, or a “soft option”, as a troubled person once described it to me in a Bible study. I went to Papua New Guinea shortly after 9/11 and I overheard an elegant Frenchman who spoke superb English talking about the matter in polished but concerned tones.

I said across the aisle of the 747 to him, “President Bush has a wonderful opportunity now to go to the Muslim world and use the huge leverage that he now has to bluntly ask them to deal with their own extremists.” He replied, “That will not happen. They want revenge.” Today we have a decade-long opportunity to reflect back on the “collateral damage” or gains caused by the “war on terror”, perceived by many Muslims as another Christian “Crusade”.

There are of course no easy answers. Several passages from our texts may help us to see this from a Christian point of view. After the forgiven slave had ill-treated the other slave we read that, “When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their Lord all that had taken place.” There is always great distress when people are ill treated, especially when their sacred lives are treated as collateral damage, fodder for other people's “ideological attractions.” People become faceless

and compassion disappears. Extremist Palestinians may have danced in the streets of Lebanon or Gaza, but elsewhere around the world people wept into the dust of what would be called Ground Zero. It is the same with every calamity. Whether it happens to Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Christians, people of other faiths, Atheists or anyone else, if it fails to touch our hearts we have wandered into the grave danger of ideological apathy and we are on unholy ground. Victimised people seek other victims unless they can cauterise their own wounds. When a huge number of people do it, then it becomes awesomely destructive.

The heart of God is in the last words of the parable. They are truly the words of the Son of God about his heavenly Father: “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” God does not have to punish an unforgiving person. If we cannot find self-respect, we cannot forgive. If we cannot forgive, then we are condemned to talking inside ourselves and outside like a cracked record: always repeating the same piece; broken. That is self-punishment, the worst of punishments, and destructive to others when aired, usually in a distorted but plausible form. As Christ said, Self-suffering and its consequences ultimately come from the inside, not from the outside. Unless we listen to one another’s hearts, globally, then we will never find the answers to effect real reconciliation.

Bishop Arthur Jones

TO PLAN:

Sept 13, Tuesday.

- Bible Study, 10am
- Bible Study @ the Tutton’s, 7:30pm.
[Cars will be leaving the church grounds at 7:15pm to # 3 Sta. Potenciana St., Urdaneta Village, where there would be a discussion group about current issues and reflections on the Scripture e.g. 9/11. Everyone is welcome]

Sept, 15, Thursday.

- Midweek Eucharist, 10am, Chapel.

Sept. 28, Wednesday. Fellowship

Gathering: Anglican Churches in the Phils & Int’l Communion of the Charismatic Episcopal Church, 9:00a.m.-2:00p.m.

Next Sunday’s Readings:

Jonah 3:10-4:11
Psalm 145
Philippians 1:21-27
Matthew 20:1-16