

The Centre forgives

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
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Pentecost 4C, 16 June 2013

2 Samuel 11.26 - 12.10, 13-15, Psalm 32, Galatians 2.15-21, Luke 7.36-8.3

I have known quite a few archers in my life ... people who shoot arrows from bows. One bloke I knew could not only hit an archery target he could ride a horse and hit one as well ... hang on to the horse with his knees and shoot an arrow across the withers of the horse and hit something. I know some of you men in this congregation can hit a target with a bullet. I am always in awe of people who can shoot at a target and hit it accurately. When I have tried archery I am simply hopeless and all spectators take their life in their hands if they are remotely in range. I am hopeless at hitting a target for a number of reasons: my upper body is weak, my eyesight is not great even with glasses, I do not spend any time getting better at it, that's practicing, and in the end there is no compelling need for me to get any better, so there is hardly any motivation.

You may be surprised to know that this idea of missing the mark, the target, is found all over the New Testament. The word is *harmatia* and in the New Testament it is always translated as sin. Sin is simply missing the target. *Harmatia* is also found throughout classical literature. In Aristotle and other ancient philosophers it is often translated as a mistake or error in judgment. In classic Greek tragedy it is used to describe the hero or heroines tragic flaw, a characteristic they have developed that in the end brings about their downfall.

This tendency they have means that when they reach for something or try to achieve some goal they simply cannot do it because their aim is out from the beginning.

We've just heard about how David, the King of Israel, found out how badly he missed the mark. Nathan, the court prophet confronts David with the appalling truth about his conduct. He has used his power and authority to seduce a woman for whom he lusts, he has used that same power and authority to have her husband, an officer in his army, killed in battle so he can appropriate Bathsheba for himself. It is not like he doesn't already have wives and concubines or for that matter wealth and security. He wants more and takes what he can. In our story he sees this truth and acknowledges how badly he has missed the mark. He recognizes that he has become seriously out of alignment with his God and his people.

One could say that David's tragic flaw was that he didn't know when to stop, or choose to stop if he did realize there was something not quite right about his behaviour. Here he is successful in everything, yet he turns his gaze to Bathsheba, watched her, desired her, which then turned to adultery, rape, cheating and finally murder. David could have changed what was happening and realigned his aim but he decided on what was patently the wrong course. He did what he wanted to do and the consequences be damned. As we look at the world around it is easy to see where this type of *harmatia* gets us all. As we human beings run around pursuing what we want at all costs we imperil the environment, we imperil our political process, we imperil the lives of others and we imperil our souls—and I do not mean we will end up in the other place. I mean our wholeness, the creativity, joy, resonance and oneness that should characterize our soul life, here and now, is put at risk.

Of course what is extraordinary in the story of David, and all our stories, is that God forgives. There is another reality in our stories of *harmatia*. We may miss the target, through ignorance, no practice, getting sidetracked, wilful miss-aim and we may hurt ourselves and others in the process but always there is the reality of forgiveness freely given by God.

It is like the centre of the universe is God, who is love. This love is steadfast, constant, like a rock, a never ending stream of mercy and compassion. We are made to be in constant motion towards this rock, this love, but we get out of alignment with the centre. We are meant to allow this love to flow through us but we hop out of the stream and go on strange adventures where we forget where the rock even is.

In our Gospel reading we hear of someone who found the rock. Where once she had been lost in the consequences of her *harmatia*, her mistakes, her misaim, she now found herself realigned and dwelling in love. Her kiss, her tears, her washing Jesus feet, are not done because she is trying to make up for past mistakes, trying to alter her karma. They are done because she is overwhelmed with gratitude and love for Christ. At some point she has found or rediscovered the love of God in Christ. She has faith in this new reality, trust in Jesus Christ that he really does reveal the underlying reality of the universe. She discovers that her identity is not defined by what others think about her, whether she is on the inside or the outside, powerful or weak, successful or a failure. She is not defined by what she thinks about herself. She instead finds herself defined by love that is hers in all times and places and she is once more realigned with this love. She is released from her guilt and shame. She is seen, understood, home...back close to the centre.

The picture of this woman and Jesus is actually a wonderful window into worship. She expresses gratitude and love. Her gesture is done in the context of hospitality and relationship. It is done at a meal time which echoes our own communion feast each Sunday where we gather around a table and share in God's ever present love. And by the way we should not imagine this woman grovelling around under a table. In Jesus day people reclined when they ate so she was probably standing at his feet, that would have been raised on a couch. Her actions show up that fact that the host, the religious leader Simon, has not done the most basic of hospitality rituals—food washing, anointing and a kiss.

Instead these are done by a woman of no account who gets that love is about hospitality, welcome and ultimately gratitude that God is in our presence, in every person and every circumstance. We come to church each week and connect with other people in part to help us find our centre again and the centre of the universe.

We can always find this centre because it is always there. We can always get back on track, perhaps imperfectly, perhaps with mistakes, perhaps with those same old habits holding us back. *Hamartia* will always be part of our life and efforts. However, God is constantly calling us, always there, always helping, always forgiving and forgetting. As far as the east is from the west so far are our sins from God and at the very centre of our being is love.

I'd like to finish with another picture of *harmatia* and realigning with the centre. As you know I play the viola, sometimes I play the violin. I am not a very good player. I describe myself as a 5th desk viola player. When I play in an orchestra, an amateur one that is, I always sit as far back as I can.

When I play I of course read the music but in the fast bits I can never keep up and if it is syncopated, that is the notes are off the beat, I am in real trouble. I get lost, get distracted by my own bad playing and the neck problem I have had for years. So I also try and be close to and listen to a very good viola player nearby, as well as the conductor. I listen to the good player and get myself back on track over and over again. Sometimes oh joy and miracle I find myself in the wave of music. I am one with it, I am souring with the strings, I am in time with the timpani, I resonating with the harmonies of the universe. Momentarily I am lost in bliss. Then I get distracted, play a wrong note and start the whole thing over again.

God embraces all our music and never gives up on us no matter our sense of failing or no being good enough. God calls us back to the centre, the beat, the deep resonances of life over and over again. Through the triune God we are offered forgiveness, love and redemption every moment. May we receive this gift and live this reality. Amen.

My friends, let us pray....