

Out of the Depths

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Revd Linda Anshell

Sunday 10th August 2003, Pentecost 9.

2 Samuel 18:5-9, 14, 31-33; Psalm 130 Out of the Depths De Profundis; Ephesians 4: (17-24) 25 - 5:2; John 6: 35, 41 – 51

... some additional readings: Oscar Wilde's essay: *De Profundis*; Hymn 648 in Together in Song; now on-line: [Grant Gallup, Nicaragua. Hominy Grits, 3rd series](#)

Feed us with your word and teach us to be truly human.

Oh Absalom, Absalom, my son, Absalom... would that I had died instead of you...

In the readings... it has taken us a leap of maybe ten years to get to Absalom's revolt against David. The lectionary jumps about six chapters.

We miss the rape of Absalom's sister. We miss Tamar's absolute desolation following the rape and Absalom taking in his sister to live in his own house.

We miss the revenge that Absalom takes two years later; killing the rapist. This was Amnon, David's eldest son and half brother to Tamar and Absalom. and then the next eight years of running away, coming back, and finally "stealing the hearts" of the people of Israel and the rebellion.

O Absalom, cries David...

Out of the depths of grief comes the psalm. Out of the depths, the primaeval chaos, the deepest places of the heart.

Oscar Wilde wrote an essay about profound suffering. Writing while in gaol he says:

"For us there is only one season, the season of sorrow. [The very sun and moon seem taken from us. Outside, the day may be blue and gold, but the light that creeps down through the thickly-muffled glass of the small iron-barred window beneath which one sits is grey and niggard.] It is always twilight in one's cell, as it is always twilight in one's heart."

and: I have lain in prison for nearly two years. Out of my nature has come wild despair; an abandonment to grief that was piteous even to look at; terrible and impotent rage; bitterness and scorn; [anguish that wept aloud; misery that could find no voice; sorrow that was dumb. I have passed through every possible mood of suffering.] Better than Wordsworth himself I know what Wordsworth meant when he said -

'Suffering is permanent, obscure, and dark
And has the nature of infinity.'

truly, "out of the depths" de profundis...

but this psalm comes from a "prison" of guilt.

"If you, O Lord, should mark out guilt, Lord who would survive?"

David was a vibrantly, truly alive person. and complex. He (or the psalmist) knows how often we cause our own suffering.

Rob spoke last week about the need for Honest confrontation. Sometimes it is difficult to honestly confront ourselves, sometimes too easy. When we think about our

own community, it can be impossible unless someone from the outside can speak to us.

Where did the bitter griefs of the previous century come from? A commentator I heard yesterday said that it was a century based on ANGER, not LOVE. Is this century to be based on FEAR? what bitterness will that lead to?

Bishop George has just returned from the youth pilgrimage with a special word for us. He and the pilgrims stayed with families in Soweto and he says in his letter to clergy that there are only two matters of significance:

Wealth and Poverty / Power and Powerlessness

Can we honestly test the things we put our hearts into by how they measure up to these two issues?

Be angry, but sin not, says Paul. Know about poverty and powerlessness, know about wealth and power. Be angry, be very angry, but make it constructive, energy giving anger. And make it be honest. An honest appraisal of our own wealth and power.

For us in Australia a word of honesty about the gated community we live in; about the sacredness of the land we walk on and the people who made it sacred.

A word about debt. We no longer have the debtor's prisons that held Oscar Wilde and my great grandfather. Nowadays we imprison whole countries with debt.

Unlike the Old Testament, the gospel connects strongly with the last two weeks. [6:35 is repeated from last week.]

In it I hear a hint of a god who walks on water; a god who knows the depths of the primaeval watery chaos.

Chris mentioned that Jesus replied to the disciples in the boat with that "simple" phrase: "I am". (it is me) Here, as also last week, we read "I am the bread of life".

This is bread for a famished people to gnaw on, bite at, devour. (when reading the Greek words that are used.)

This is another "I am" statement of John's. It is a hint, a reflection, of the divinity of Jesus. Of god being present.

or is it that? ...this is the child of Joseph and Mary! we know him, say his neighbours...

this is a flesh and blood person! yes. flesh and blood.

But it is this Jesus who gives us life, gives meaning, is bread... the "stuff of life" - not manna that is here one moment gone the next, but solid belly filling FOOD.

Life for the world.

Wilde had tumbled from striding the literary stage to absolute rock bottom. He wrote about his sufferings that

"I could not bear them to be without meaning. Now I find hidden somewhere away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the whole world is meaningless, and suffering least of all. That something hidden away in my nature, like a treasure in a field, is Humility."

So Wilde found humility in his prison cell... humility, humus, the stuff of the earth.

and in the gospel, John talks of a god who has come down.

come down from heaven. Humbled, become the stuff of the earth. flesh. flesh and bone. flesh and blood.

this is not a safe god. It is a god who is with us and beside us. a god who will confront us honestly

We will try to keep god safely up in heaven, the lord up there, [religion is often about keeping us safe from god!]

but god is here as well.

humbled and present

and that broken flesh is given to us to eat. given for the life of the world.

we sing of the glory of the lord in highest heavens, but Ireneaus says that the glory of god is a person fully alive.

(from the offertory Hymn, we pray: Teach us O Lord your lessons, as in our daily life, we struggle to be human. Amen.