

Sunday Thought

19th June 2022 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

1 Kings 19: 1 – 4 (5 – 7) 8 -15a
Psalm 42 and 43
Galatians 3: 23 - 29
Luke 8:26 – 39

Right Minds

Among many thoughts from today's scriptures one picture and one phrase stick in my mind. The picture is of Jesus in a field close to the seashore, surrounded by a crowd of people, most standing well clear, while he talks to a broken figure kneeling at his feet. It is a man newly dragged from the hell of primitive life in a local cemetery - a life of uncontrollable, unrestrained violence which a contemporary psychoanalyst would be at pains to define. The phrase which stays in my thought is '*they found the man clothed and in his right mind.*' This Gospel story raises many questions, as it did for little Megan, hearing it for the first time in her scripture lesson. '*Oh! Those poor little pigs*', she sobbed. Pigs were one issue of course. By Jewish law they were non-kosher, but things were probably less strict on that side of the lake, and, no doubt, the Romans did like their bacon breakfasts. Then there was the problem of Jesus' interference with lucrative businesses and, of course the question of demons and their recognition of divine authority ... and so much more.



The words hit me because I am aware of the world's great need just now for people – especially leaders – who can sit down *in their right minds*. People who can think right about themselves, right about power, poverty, provisions, peace – I could go on right through the alphabet. Those are all issues scattered throughout the readings for today. Even Elijah had to struggle to hear the right mind of God. The contest of religions on Mount Carmel has always been a good story. It's about political and religious corruption in times of famine and war, involving ruthless slaughter of enemies, and all too reminiscent of present events in Russia and Ukraine, Afghanistan, North Korea, Myanmar etc. etc. The whole story tells of king's Ahab's wife, Jezebel bringing pagan religion to defile God's people and the prophet Elijah's courageous actions, from mutual horrendous war crimes to miraculous fire lighting with wet kindling. Then things changed, as they can in every conflict. Elijah, distressed, depressed and fearful retreats before the revengeful wrath of Queen Jezebel, but his running away becomes running to meet God on the holy Mount Sinai. There I have an image of Elijah sitting in a cave entrance, *in his right mind*, learning God's way and power is not expressed in violent wind, earth tremors and fire, but in the gentle whispers of peace-making.





The beautiful, much-loved psalm today has contemporary images too. It's about deported refugees and makes me think of our government wanting to repel refugees and asylum seekers by the threat of deportation to Rwanda without choice – to an unknown way of life, climate, and employment opportunity, in a place with a recent history of civil war and genocide. These people will understand the psalmist's experience as he wrote his words of desire for his real home. He longs to escape cruelty, shame, racism, and religious abuse. He aches for God and for true worship, but still clings to his trust in the Lord's never-failing love.

Finally, Paul writes of religious life before Jesus. It was all to do with the Law, with rules, judgements, and condemnation. Now, Jesus has put us right with God by his own life and death and it is by faith, as it was in the beginning with Abraham, that we are united to God as we become of one mind and heart with Jesus. Today, so often bored and confused by our expressions of religion, we are called to return to the joy and hope of *right-minded* life in Jesus at the heart of it all. Now we keep and live his love-laws and build our worship around his mind!

So many thoughts today, but I want to stay with the first image of a changed man east of Galilee. He could see how being in a right mind with Jesus changed everything for God and his people. He pleaded to travel with Jesus' mission. Jesus refused his request – *No! You must stay here. Share in my work with your own community.* That would not have been easy when this new disciple was just recovering from crippling the life and trade of that same community! What a vision though! Me and you, people and nations all sharing the mind of Christ Jesus [Philippians 2.5].

Longing for God (a prayer with Psalms 42 and 43 in mind)



Lord! This is one of those lonely times when I miss you!
It's like longing for a cool shower on a hot, sultry day.

Everything seems to be going wrong.
I find it hard to believe you are listening to my prayers,
and even less that you will answer them.
Faith doesn't seem so real, or so simple as it did before.

But why do I think like this?
You have not changed!
You are still my saviour, my truth, my light.
You love never fails.
So I will still praise you and trust you,
believing my tears will nourish
new seeds of hope and happiness in me, and for others.

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