

Isolation Radio Talk

Who will rise and be the voice of Nathan the Prophet today?

Good Morning

Whenever I have spoken to you since December last, what I have said has been about, or related to, significant events in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus who, the bible tells us is, 'The Christ.' The word Christ comes from a Greek word meaning 'The Anointed One'; in Hebrew that is translated 'The Messiah'.

As well as recounting the life and teaching of Jesus, I have tried to speak in a way that brings our Lord into the present, a present in which he walks beside you, his hand in yours. Now in the season of Trinity we can explore far and wide; this Sunday I go right back to the beginning. One of the readings set for today from the Hebrew Scriptures, (some still call them the Old Testament) is the continuing story of Creation where Adam and Eve walk in the Garden of Eden, in the cool breeze of the evening.

I should say at this point that you will do well not to think of Adam and Eve as real people, or that what we read has anything to do with an historical event. When our ancestors, long before anything was written, began to wonder where they had come from; when they began to ask questions about why things were as they were, they told stories about the beginning of time, how the earth was created and how they came to be; they passed these legends, these myths, from generation to generation by word of mouth. Some were borrowed from other tribes; the Hebrew tribe absorbed and changed stories to include their own understanding of the mystery of their existence and their sense of obligation to the Creator of all things.

As our ancestors searched and imagined answers, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is their gift to us; it is a timeless story. (You can read it in the Book of Genesis, chapter 3 verses 8 to 15.) There is poetry and wonder in the account of how evil becomes a presence in our world. Any who have walked the woods and valleys around Blagdon lake on a spring evening will know how the imagination is caught, transported, and shapes your understanding.

The significance of the Garden of Eden is not about trees and fruit (nowhere is an apple mentioned but interestingly, apple and evil are the same word in Latin); neither is it a story about sex from which some in the church of the present day cannot ever seem to escape; its real significance lies in the fact that as men and women increase in their awareness of self they come to make themselves, rather than God, the centre of the world. The story of, and the life of, and the way he was, tell how Christ reverses this temptation to put self at the centre of all things. St Paul, in an echo of the Garden of Eden wrote that 'he did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped'. Putting self, putting the ego, at the centre of everything is a curse upon our own times.

Today you witness great movements of people responding to political dogma. You observe totalitarian states claiming absolute authority over the lives of their people. COVID-19, has

obliged us to accept many restraints on freedoms hard won in the past. The 'planned society' is a hungry beast demanding ever more power. Such a society does not like the question to be asked - power for what? Its answer speaks of safety, progress, growth, and efficiency. It is more reluctant to value accountability.

Those twin problems of the purpose and accountability of power are illustrated in the life of King David, a towering figure in the Bible. I will not tell his story in full; of the shepherd lad anointed by Samuel and made king; of his introduction to King Saul in the desperate fight against the Philistines; of his acceptance into the Royal Household and his friendship with Jonathan; of Jonathan's death and of the old King's paranoia, such that sought David's death. I want to take you further on when David hides with his supporters in the cave of Adullam when the Philistines were in possession of David's City called the House of Bread - we call it Bethlehem. He longed for a drink of water from the well in his home village. David's friends fought their way into the village to bring him water. When they returned David did not drink it. Instead, he poured it onto the ground; a thank-offering for the self-sacrifice and the service of his friends. This was not an empty gesture but a sign that he would not benefit from what had nearly cost his friends their lives.

There was darkness too in David's character. After he becomes king, he seduces Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his army commanders. She becomes pregnant and when David failed to hide his guilt, he orders Uriah to be abandoned in the front of the battle to be killed. He was! Bathsheba lived in David's household; their son was born. The king's power was absolute; he ruled absolutely.

Enter now the prophet Nathan. He told David of a rich man who seized and killed a poor man's lamb to provide a meal for a visitor. David was furious and judged the offender because he had 'no pity.' Then Nathan says those haunting words – 'You are the man.' David accepted Nathan's judgement with penitence. David's son died.

Jesus saw two aspects of power illustrated in King David (Mark 2 v23) the needs of people, and accountability to God. They are guiding principles by which nations, communities and individuals must measure their behaviour. Thoughtful people will challenge and that may involve political and social action. Who now, in our time, will rise and be the voice of Nathan the Prophet?

The more influence you wield, the greater your responsibility. You will value others; you will control self-interest. There is a concern for truth; and, a Christian will add, accountability to God. This is the promise and the warning in the picture Christ gives of judgement. By this you will know that power is not a possession but a stewardship from God.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Let us pray

Lord, I am part of the tension and injustice of the world.
Forgive our human selfishness, to which I contribute;
heal the resentment between people, of which I am a part;
and come into the world's conflicts, in which I share by being human.
Take my unworthiness and sorrow,
and us them in your great work
of healing and redeeming humanity.
Amen.