

PENTECOST 5B 27-06-2021 *The Reverend Lorna Green*

2 Samuel 1.1, 17-27; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 8.7-15; Mark 5.21-43

From 2 Samuel: ¹ After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. ¹⁷ David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. ²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. ²⁵ How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. ²⁶ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

From 2 Corinthians 8: ⁹ For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. ¹³ I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.

From Mark 5: ²⁵ Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. ²⁶ She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' ²⁹ Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

(Jesus) took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, 'Talitha cum', which means, 'Little girl, get up!' ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age).

Three great readings today- a preacher's dilemma!

The Old Testament reading from the Second Book of Samuel describes David's lament over the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan. Saul had been David's enemy for years and had tried to kill him because he was a threat to his rule; Samuel had anointed him king in place of Saul, David was a successful military leader and he was far more popular than Saul with the people. Eventually Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in battle and David could finally take over and be king.

Jonathan was David's great friend, and he had supported and protected David from his dad. David grieved for his friend; he also expressed grief for Saul, but I wonder how much of that was because the killing of a king sets a dangerous precedent.

Many have wondered about David's relationship with Jonathan. We read that they loved each other, and in David's lament he says, 'I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;

greatly beloved were you to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women.'

We know that David had six or seven wives, multiple concubines, and fathered numerous children, but he loved Jonathan first and above his women.

In those far-off days a leader had to prove his masculinity by fighting and reproducing- which David did; but he loved Jonathan as well, and everybody knew about it.

In the reading from the second letter to the church in Corinth the people are asked to be generous to the struggling church in Jerusalem. Corinth is doing well; people in Jerusalem are hungry, and Paul asks the other churches to support the place where it all began. He asks for a fair balance so that all may have what they need.

He reminds the Corinthian people of the generosity shown by other church communities, and asks them to finish what they started, getting their contribution ready for him to take back to the struggling folks in Jerusalem.

This was an early lesson for the Christian Church, that supporting people who are poor and hungry is what we must do and sharing what we have is a blessing to us as well as the recipients.

We support the food bank of CARAD- the Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees, and parishioners bring non-perishable food to donate. We support the Balga Breakfast Club, and we will have a special winter collection for Grace Café in Joondalup which supports homeless people.

Many of us are now in the habit of picking up a couple of extra packets or cans when we go shopping; and all the little donations add up to a great deal. Our generosity supports people who live nearby and far away.

The reading from Mark's gospel tells of two women who were healed by Jesus. One was at the beginning of her adult life and was a much-loved daughter; the other was older and had a hidden ailment that caused her shame and social exclusion.

Jesus showed great love and gentleness as he healed these two. He gave the worried father his immediate attention and went with him, and on the way was touched by the desperate woman who shouldn't really have gone near him.

Jesus ignored social and religious conventions in both instances. The older woman was ritually unclean because of her bleeding and should not have touched a man.

Far from telling her off, Jesus healed her and praised her for her faith. The young girl was dead, and dead bodies were also considered to be unclean; but Jesus took her hand and gently lifted her up, telling her amazed parents to give her something to eat.

What did it mean to be 'ritually unclean'? In the Old Testament books of Numbers and Leviticus we find that all kinds of things could make a person unclean: eating the wrong animals or touching a dead body or someone with leprosy for instance.

Women were considered unclean during and following menstruation and after childbirth. There were ceremonies and sacrifices one could perform to be considered 'clean' again; but while you were unclean you could not enter a place of worship, and you must not touch another person or they too would be unclean.

Jesus shows us that following him, being his people, being church, is not about strict obedience to religious rules. He touched people who were believed to have leprosy, people who were bleeding and even dead people. Being a follower of Jesus is about love, relationships, generosity, and kindness. It is most definitely not about who's in and who's out, who is acceptable and clean and who is not.

The church is a people who gather in a place, and that place must be where anyone can find healing and peace, gentleness, and acceptance.

The church is a people who offer what they can, according to their means, for the benefit of others.

When we commend our beloved dead to God, we may not lament with the eloquence of David; but we support one another in grief and we offer the comfort of God's loving promises to all who mourn.

Love, relationships, generosity, and kindness. These are surely the very best things we can wish for our community, our children and ourselves. The church isn't perfect- no community or organisation is; but God loves the church and wants the best for all of us, so let us give thanks to God for the church that continues to offer inclusion, support, and nurture to people all around the world.

The Lord be with you.