

I like movies and books where the good guys win whether it is fantasy like the Marvel Universe or history, like World War II. I like it when might and right are combined, and our heroes are successful in fighting for what they believe. I like it when the moral distinctions are clear and the conviction that after the battle the winners will rule justly. But these are fantasies, not reality. Unfortunately, the world that humanity has created is not quite that clear cut, the good guys are not always good, the bad guys are not entirely bad. What's really hard to accept is that when we think of ourselves as the good guys we discover that we are responsible for some evil deeds. It is hard to figure out how to live with ourselves. Just look at how shocking it is to expose what has happened in our history as a country, the more we hear from voices that we have ignored, like the descendants of slavery or the native Americans whom we pushed into exile, the more we realize that we need to come to terms with our past, that it is not all glory and forward progress but that we are who we are through blood and sacrifice and betrayal.

The story of King David gives us a lens through which to see ourselves. David, the man after God's own heart. David sought God and sought to do God's will and remained in relationship with God even when he failed to do what was right. David, the boy who defeated Goliath and led Saul's armies to victories over Israel's enemies, David, who danced in ecstasy before the Ark of the Covenant, this David had feet of clay. David was all too human. After all his victories and after assuming the kinship after Saul's death, David became complacent. He rested on his laurels. In our gospel reading he no longer leads his armies but sends them into battle while he indulges himself in the pleasures of the flesh, even going so far as to take another man's wife just because he fancied her. Somehow breaking one commandment seems to lead to another. When David learns that Bathsheba is pregnant, he doesn't want to expose himself and tries to trick her husband into sleeping with her so that the child might be considered his. When that doesn't work David contrives to have the man killed in battle by having his general leave Uriah unsupported in the midst of battle. In essence David has murdered Uriah without pulling the proverbial trigger himself. These are not the last of David's sins and yet he will be remembered as Israel's greatest ruler.

Furthermore, although God has chosen David, God does hold him accountable for his actions. Nevertheless, God's promise to David includes protection from his enemies, safety for the people of Israel, and a throne that will be established forever, (2 Samuel 7:8-17) a throne that would be occupied by a different kind of king.

In complete contrast to David, his heir, Jesus Christ demonstrates a different approach: power through obedience, conquest through peace. In our gospel today we see that Jesus achieved his victories not through violence but through complete obedience to God's will, and through his compassion for the needs of the world. Because of his commitment to his mission Jesus was able to feed the 5,000 men and that's not counting the women and children. Jesus was able to multiply food so that the crowds that followed him might experience God's abundance. The crowds were mesmerized by Jesus' apparent power and dazzled by his ability to perform miracles but they totally miss the point, so much so that Jesus realizes that they are

going to come and make him king by force - an act that would have unleashed a cycle of violence. Jesus knows that his destiny is not to be an earthly king with all the accoutrements: wealth, land, and armies. He was to be a different kind of king. Therefore, he resists the temptation to acquire earthly power and withdraws to the mountain by himself, to open himself to his Father, and stay on track for his mission.

We have seen and we continue to experience the paradox that might making right frequently leads to corruption, abuse, and injustice on an individual as well as a societal level, even with the best of intentions. There is however an alternative to this endless cycle of success through violence and failure through sin. The Son of God became incarnate so that we might see another way, and that way is the way of the cross. It's the way of self-offering, of seeking justice for the sick, the poor, and the oppressed, of living in response to God. It's not sexy, it doesn't gather accolades, it's very hard to do but it is the work that Christ invites us to do as his followers. When we make the choice to follow Jesus, we are constantly aware of living into this tension between the teachings of God in Christ and the temptations and demands of the world. Bottom line, we must be both wary of thinking that the end justifies the means and that any ending we achieve by following Christian principals may not look like success to those around us.

If we are honest with ourselves, we realize that we cannot manage this challenge alone. Fortunately, we are not alone. The words of our collect says it all.

*O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

Amen.