



Proper 19, Year B – August 9, 2009

2 Samuel 18.5-9,15,31-33

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Canon M. Ansley Tucker

I cannot think of another passage of scripture that moves more deeply than the image of King David weeping over the death of his son Absalom. Absalom is a scoundrel, pure and simple. He has murdered his brothers first in line to the throne; he has inveigled his way into the hearts of the people, and declared himself to be king; and he has put a price on his father's head.

But here is the thing: the parent can never stop loving the child. David musters the troops, and tells his commanders, "For my sake, deal gently with the young man, Absalom."

As if!

David's men come upon Absalom, his hair caught in a tree, literally swinging in the breeze, and they dispatch him.

And when David heard that Absalom was slain, he went up to his chamber over the gate and wept. He is inarticulate. Inconsolable. And, in the hollow of his soul, the only words that will come are the agonized cry of a parent, "Would God I had died for thee."

Listen.

[Performance of Tompkins, When David heard]

In this moment -- for all the ruthlessness of King David, for all his moral lapses and sexual shenanigans -- in just this moment, as David rocks back and forth, my heart goes out to him, and I like him once again.

His anguish is palpable, and he does nothing to stop it. It washes over him, and he is drenched in tears.

Our society feeds us all kinds of concoctions to numb us to our pain: everything from pharmaceuticals to booze, from blithering entertainment, to the pious twaddle that passes for preaching. We go about robotically, living within the narrow bandwidth of a truncated emotional life. Somehow we have convinced ourselves that pain is bad. We would rather clothe ourselves in the mind-numbing blandishments of those would tell us that everything is just peachy keen – and if it isn't, it will be soon.

Don't fall for it.

The anguish of a human soul, indeed our very capacity to feel anguish, is part of what makes us human. Our anguish is the measure of our compassion. Our sense of loss is the measure of our love. And our ability to feel it is the sure sign that we are alive, and that we are "real".

It is no part of the Christian gospel that we are to be spared pain or sorrow – indeed, the Christian gospel puts the experience of death, and pain, and loss, at the very centre of what it means to be redeemed. There is no gospel without the death

of Jesus; there is no gospel without the tears of God. So let us not be in too great a hurry to rush past our pain – even though it hurts.

In the hurting is our humanity. And in our humanity is the image of God.

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