

Pentecost 3. 13/6/10. Sermon by Venerable Susanna Pain.

I am sure you remember the feeling of being where you shouldn't be or being caught in a place where you ought not be found, or doing something wasn't right?

Throughout history we have stories like this, and on a much larger scale stories like ones of taking ownership of another's land through violence and conflict. But there are also stories of groups of people standing firm and resisting injustice. Speaking up for the powerless, the abused, the victimized — seeking justice for the excluded ... even here in our own land (ideas from Seasons of the Spirit).

We read of violence and petulant behaviour and in 1 Kings 21 and I put myself in the story, observing Ahab, who wants Naboth's vineyard for a veggie garden — he offers to pay handsomely and even to find another vineyard for Naboth — it seems reasonable enough — But Naboth refuses — after all it is his ancestral land. 'No' he says, politely enough. So Ahab the King of Israel sulks, like a small child when he can't have what he wants. Ahab sulks and he won't eat his dinner. His wife Jezebel offers to sort it out. She makes sure Naboth is killed, on trumped up charges... 'there you go Ahab, Naboth is dead, go and get your vineyard veggie patch' ... she says. Then, along comes Elijah, 'Have you killed and also taken possession? 'Have you found me, my enemy' says Ahab.

'I have found you all right' — answers Elijah. 'Because of what you have done, you've had it; you and your entire household are dead! Especially Jezebel.'

These prophets, these truth tellers, whistle blowers — they always catch us up — justice is called for and they speak out. Do you?

Have you seen the film, *The Lemon Tree*? A grove of lemon trees stands at the center of this light, yet pointed, fable from the Israeli Director Eran Riklis. The trees belong to Salma Zidane, a Palestinian widow who inherited them from her father and who has the misfortune of living on the west bank border next door to the Israeli Defence Minister.

The lemons provide Selma with a modest income — until the Secret Service, acting through the Minister, declare that the grove poses a risk to security and must be cut down. So, before Salma knows it, her property is placed under lock and key, observed from above by an armed guard. But Salma isn't about to give in. Why should any Government have the right to take away property that has been in her family for generations?

Thus begins a legal battle that has far — reaching consequences for everyone concerned — including the Ministers neglected wife Mira, and Salma's keen young lawyer, Ziad.

The allegorical meanings are obvious to a fault. It is about the control of space in the most literal sense. But none of the main characters are seen as villains, or fools, or as even mere representatives of given political points of view. They are all fully aware of the roles in a symbolic drama, which eventually reaches a global audience.

Near the climax, Ziad the lawyer, tells reporters that his struggle is comparable to the battle of David and Goliath "in your Jewish Bible", while far away in America, Salma's immigrant son proudly follows the story on TV in a bar.

The Lemon Tree is a story about loneliness and isolation, focused on a group of people who live in close proximity but in wholly separate worlds. The difference is that struggle is over something tangible — and, at least, members of the opposed sides are able to look at each other in recognition of each other, or even in friendship.

But happy endings, as we are eventually told, are possible only in Hollywood. Understandably, the Director Riklis is unable to find a full resolution for his story within the terms of fiction. All he can do is imagine is one potential upshot of the battle, and leave us to mourn its cost ... of injustice.

In the Gospel we see the woman anointing Jesus' feet and then we have that exchange between Jesus and that woman, and between Jesus and Simon.

Simon is caught out in his mumbling mutterings. "Doesn't he know who she is?" "Which will love the one who forgave debts more" Jesus asks "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debts," begrudges Simon...

"You got it!"

Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little i.e. you! He said to the woman, 'your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you, go in peace.' There is a sting in Jesus' words here. Am I Simon, the judging stingy one, or the woman

— forgiven much?

We all have the capacity for both good and evil. As Jesus' followers, we are challenged to seek congruity between our faith, our words, and our actions. What does it mean for daily living that God comes about our activities and expects us to act in ways that are just and life giving? How do you choose justice? (Seasons of the Spirit page 32 Congregational life Pentecost 1).

In your workplace.

In your family.

In your neighborhood?

Choose justice.

On Monday I attended the launch of Luke 14. I was fortunate to be one of about 300 people who were part of the crowd at the Southern Cross Club at Woden.

I arrived early, and ended up with Jill, Tanya, Adrian, and Harris, sharing the lift with a man in a wheelchair. I said something silly like "I usually use the stairs but ..." And the man in the wheel chair, quick as a flash, said "so do I but I decided to catch the lift today" This man had a great sense of humour and turned out to be one of the keynote speakers! I felt embarrassed and stupid.

We got out on the first floor and someone showed us to our table. {Tanya, Adrian, Bek and Stuart, members of Rainbow Fellowship were designated 'Welcomers' so they were shown to their spots of welcoming. Stuart, Bek and I waited by the stairs to welcomes guests and pointed them in the right direction.

On the large screens in the function room photos were projected, including many of our Rainbow Fellowship.

The event began with a welcome, then the singing choir performed an item. Elena, who signed for our Christmas Carols service last year, shared her story. Elena has impaired hearing — she is deaf. She told of her work in India and China teaching people sign language. She also spoke of her strong Christian faith, and the love and support of family, and the Church. Her story is inspirational. Maybe someday she

will come and speak to us here. Jim Stanton the man in the wheelchair who came up in the lift with us was the second speaker. He was hilarious and poignant. He had us laughing and crying at the same time. (You'll see him on the DVD soon.)

The third speaker was Thérèse Rein. She told the story of her father who was in a wheelchair. He is an aeronautical engineer ... I found, Thérèse also, very moving and challenging. That's why I wanted to share this with you.

When I look at someone with a physical and intellectual disability do I see the disability or the person who happens to have a disability?

How inclusive am I? Do I include them at my table?

How inclusive are we at Holy Covenant? — only now are we building a wheelchair accessible toilet: and putting in a hearing loop, yet Jim in his wheelchair says, "I don't care so much about the physical environment. I care if you don't talk to me."

It's a matter of justice and empowerment.

Its about the while body of Christ.

The film tells better than I can ...

Act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with your God.

Choose justice.