

22 July 2012

8 Pentecost Proper 11

Our Old Testament reading today is understandably, but unfortunately cut just a little too short. Some of you may not even be aware of it, but that last line of our Old Testament reading is meant to evoke the image of Jesus Christ. After the resurrection of Jesus, passages like: "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me" have taken a whole different meaning from what they originally had.

Now, in its original context, it seems that God's words are referring to Solomon - he is, after all, the son of David who ends up building the Temple - but the way it is worded is just ambiguous enough that the earliest Christians could read it and see a prefiguring of Jesus.

I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. In fact, I think it is entirely right that we Christians should read the Old Testament in full knowledge of Jesus. I think we should plumb the depths of the Old Testament while keeping foremost in our minds not only Jesus, but the entire Trinity.

They are the lenses through which we *need* to read the Old Testament. They are the voices through which we need to hear the Old Testament speaking to us.

But we miss out on a few things by stopping where we do. Unfortunately, I only have time to point out one.

Interestingly enough, our Psalm summarizes most of what's left out of the Old Testament passage. In fact, the Psalm is a fair summary of just what 2 Samuel 7 is saying. "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me." But, "If they break my statutes." If they "do not keep my commandments, I will punish their transgressions"

And here is the all important "But"...But, I will not take my love from

him. God promises to love the offspring of David forever. God knows they will not completely keep the law, and when they break the law, they will have to be punished. But, God will always love them.

But here we have to be cautious; cautious because generations of Christians have been raised to think that whenever bad things happen to us, we must have committed some sin and God must be punishing us just as the Psalmist writes about.

But, at that point we've gone too far and a big part of Jesus' ministry was correcting just that misunderstanding. Remember John's Gospel story of the man blind from birth and the question of why this bad thing happened to him? Did he sin or his parents? Jesus points out that neither one sinned. The man's blindness was *not* a punishment from God. When bad things happen to us, such as birth defects or even cancer, it's *not* the case that God is punishing us for some transgression. That's not the sort of punishment that God promises.

God's promise is really quite a bit more frightening than blindness or even cancer. 2d Samuel, the part which comes right after our reading for today ends, tells us that when we break God's law, our punishment will come at the hands of other people.

Now, when we put on our Christian lenses, we see how mysterious that is. It's more than a little unsettling to think that God uses other people to punish us for our sins since it's so hard to tell when we are being punished for sin and when we are being persecuted.

In both cases, it's other people inflicting harm upon us. We see this oh so clearly with Jesus - he was completely without sin and yet he suffered greatly at the hands of people.

I can't pretend to fully understand this mystery, at David's time if you stayed on the right side of God, people weren't going to bully you around. God would protect you from harm.

On the other hand, *with Jesus*, we see a truly righteous person who was beaten, maimed and killed. Moreover, Jesus tells the apostles, and us too, that his followers can expect the same sort of treatment.

The one thing that remains abundantly clear. The one thing which comes through most clearly and most consistently, is just this. When we do break God's laws, he will not take his love away from us.

The simple fact of the matter is that when we break God's laws, we are distancing ourselves from God. When we are immoral, we are distancing ourselves from God.

But God will always call us back. God will always take us back.

But, there's one more very important thing that gets left out because of the way our Old Testament reading ends. A few lines after God has spoken his words of everlasting love for David and David's offspring, we get to hear David's response.

I happen to think that it is the only appropriate response. It's the only appropriate response because it speaks to a deep appreciation and humility. David's words to this incredible promise God has just made to him are these: "Who am I?" Who am I that God would bless me so? It's a simple statement, but it speaks volumes.

Each and every one of us has something precious, something to be thankful for. And none of us deserve it.

All that we have, we have by the grace of God. It's that gratitude. It's that appreciation. It's that humility - that is recalled to us at each Eucharist.

It's why we call the Eucharist our "sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving." It's why the angels continually sing praises to God

and why, at the end of every Morning Prayer, our General Thanksgiving takes the form it does.

So let us be thankful and humble and yet confident enough to know that God's love is everlasting even if our love isn't. Amen.