

Two shepherds – two cities

2 Sam 5:1-5; 9-10; 2 Cor 12:2-1-; Mk 6:1-13

Politics and music are two things that matter to me – and in the next few minutes, I hope you will have a little understanding of why.

If I'm honest, I am grateful that I am not trapped in the Old Testament. Between you and me – I don't like David. Of course, if I said that on a street corner in Israel, bad things would happen.

The place of faith – or even discussion of faith in the public arena is fraught with danger. Yet the God we believe in has a direct impact on Government – Old testament or New?

I struggle with the whole idea that God's purpose is being fulfilled through the actions of the State. In this case, David. We cannot apply Biblical solutions to our modern problems as we (history) have moved on. It is no longer acceptable to have multiple wives, slaves and invade sovereign countries in the name of God. Are you with me?

Not everyone has moved on. if you live in the Old Testament – how do you separate church and state? For example, Israel as a state and Israel as a religious community are almost impossible to dissect. It was recently reported that a Muslim high court judge and some members of the new Knesset (parliament) could not/would not sing the Israeli national anthem. It was a scandal! That beautiful song, Hatikvah – (hum a few bars). Translated, the title means “the hope” – it is a song like the people in Babylon yearning to go home. It says...

“For as long as in our hearts, the Jewish soul sings....”
and finishes with ...”to be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem.”

Well, if you are not Jewish – there is a problem. What if our national anthem had a line like “Australian Catholics let us rejoice...”?

There has always been Arab Israeli citizens right from when Israel was declared a country. Yet, the conversation about being a multicultural society has barely gotten off the ground.

In today's readings – there are two shepherds. David is crowned as a union between God and Israel. David is a political figure anointed to fulfill God's

wishes in spite of his very human weaknesses. He ain't no angel – that's for sure.

David who conquered armies, smote enemies, subdued the unruly foreigners in his midst...and built the greatest city on earth....

And Jesus who built nothing; 'conquered' with gentle kindness; celebrated the weak and meek; who hurt no one; owned nothing; and 'lost' the battle in order to win.

What do we do with the incredible differences between the two shepherd kings?

While we're looking at incredible differences, I want to touch on the confusion between all the Jerusalem(s). Because I think that's where humankind sometimes takes a right turn right into hell. Well not hell but confusing cement with sentiment; or maybe there's a better way to say that.

David built a great edifice to celebrate his greatness – Jesus built a movement. The Kingdom on earth will not be created in stone – but in people's hearts.

A lot happens when you confuse the two. It must be a thing in humans that we keep trying to make things concrete. There was a time, long ago, when the Bishop of Goulburn refused to consecrate wooden churches because he saw them as a temporary structures.

We don't like being stuck between a rock and a soft place ---

The Jerusalem in the hymn we heard earlier by the Welsch Choir is an idea of the kingdom of God settling like fog on the verdant lands of the UK.

In contrast, the lyrics to **Yerushalayim** – the one that I learned as a child, describe a golden city. It was not about conquering an idea but recreating a time of glory. Reclaiming a place.

It talks about a lonely, deserted place: still beautiful but a bit like Rapunzel, just waiting to be saved. Empty...

How the cisterns have dried
The market-place is empty
And no one frequents the Temple Mount
In the Old City.

And in the caves in the mountain
Winds are howling
And no one descends to the Dead Sea
By way of Jericho.

There is a verse that says 'I'm coming' 'we will be back' and then....

We have returned to the cisterns
To the market and to the market-place
A ram's horn calls out on the Temple Mount
In the Old City.

And in the caves in the mountain
Thousands of suns shine -
We will once again descend to the Dead Sea
By way of Jericho!

Jerusalem has never been empty.

Reconciliation between the physical and the metaphysical ideas is very difficult. State owned power & real estate vs loving kindness; peace and loaves and fishes: (enough for everyone) are really opposing ideas.

Modern Israel is fixed on real estate, reclaiming land, regaining the conquering armies that David once had. It is a soup¹ of politics, history and religion. There are lots of people in opposition to current policies but as it stands, Israel has a conservative, religious government in power (as does Iran) and so its actions are dictated by the history of its faith.

I was raised as a Zionist – as probably you were too. We all saw the film *Exodus* and we all cheered for how Israel built something from nothing. Looking back, I realise how clearly the film depicted terra nullius: a land that is legally deemed to be unoccupied or uninhabited. Just as we did in White Australian history. At the time, we all accepted it was an empty country.² Now we are not so naïve. I visited many Arab Israeli villages near where I lived. But it didn't twig.

¹ A chicken soup, if you like

² Note the song depicts it as empty and lonely

But then it did. Living in a war zone changed me forever. So many of my childhood beliefs were shattered. I realised that all sides commit war crimes – even good guys. You see that today in the investigation of SAS in Afghanistan.

I realised that men and boys start fights but that women and that children pay the price. I saw the vulnerable used as pawns on both sides. I became disillusioned and disgusted by ritual over faith.³

Ironically, orthodox Jews do not serve in the army. They have religious exemption – BUT they had, and still have, the balance of power in the Parliament. So while they won't kill anyone – they direct others to do it for them. During the 6-day war, Jerusalem was re-taken. Before the streets were cleared of the dead and wounded, a mob of Orthodox Jewish men stormed the city to worship at the wailing wall. They had to step over people. I was horrified. The images never left me.

Where we (as Christian churches) have gone wrong – was when we confused the two – embracing the Old Testament covenant between God and country or the leaders of that country. Think of the Crusades; Spanish inquisition; the French Wars of Religion; Oliver Cromwell; the American Puritans; The Holocaust; The stolen generations both here and in Canada. With government mandated church or church mandated government – things go awry. We move away from the basic tenants of faith, particularly Christ's teachings, and towards something fundamentally sinister.

The church has a radical other worldliness. It asks for Christians not to be taken out of the world but not to belong to it. That is what Jesus was saying in his sending out. Our world is oriented towards one, The One, not certified by the world. Whenever it neglects its otherworldliness and assumes it exists as an institution like all other institutions, it contradicts its very being. And that is our dilemma managing good governance and safety without becoming what we fear.

Our cathedrals – and don't get me wrong, I love cathedrals – are the opposite of Jesus' instructions – take nothing with you except a staff, no bag, no money in your belts. Our cathedrals are, in a way, trying to build a Jerusalem. We *need* bricks. It's human. We have tried to recreate the Temple because that's all we know. And yet, it is in conflict inside us. Sadly, Ideas are not enough.

³ Don't start me on pilgrims trying to win God's favour like pick me!

The state can sometimes be the agent of God's purposes and sometimes their enemy. The Christian right spoke through Trump. It has an impact. Women's rights are being repealed state after state. The current Australian government inaction on climate change is not just economic influence – it sits comfortably a theology of end times. God is destroying the earth for His own purpose – not man – so why should government interfere? Mighty God who smotes and destroys through the hands of Government.

And so I return the songs we heard today -

They matter. You've seen me push back on some of our old hymns and even swap out the words for others. Sometimes it is for inclusiveness

– but mostly it is because when we use military language, we are professing the God of David: That might and power will overcome all enemies – all problems. That is God's will that we slay our way to redemption – and I just don't buy it. Swords and shields and crushing the enemy – not in my world. I've seen the results. That is not what Jesus said.

The last song we played was *O Jerusalem* by the Porter's gate. This clearly puts us back to the call for Christian otherworldliness. It is a prayer where Jerusalem is again a metaphor for the Kingdom of God.

They have told us of a city	Come in to bless and rest
Where our tears are washed away	
And every shadowed valley	[Verse 3]
Is washed in endless day	They have told us of a chorus
	Where our voices join as one
[Verse 2]	In songs of celebration
They have told us of a table	That all our wars are done
Where the poor are honoured	
guests	[Chorus]
Where all the weary wanderers	

God's true power comes to expression in weakness and not in the events that might otherwise seem to validate a mighty God – victories and successes. The criteria for discerning God's presence are radically redefined by the cross. Christ is found in his people's ordinariness, their humbleness. Jesus did not subdue his people – or His enemies through power and might – but through ideas.

That Jesus was rejected by his home crowd illustrates the rejection the disciples will face on their mission. The message is so clear – go, stay humble, (and could I add – don't build stuff,) receive graciously, live hopefully, expect rejection and live on – in never ending hope.

My father once said to me – I never learned anything that didn't hurt. What he was saying was it was his failures that made him the man that he was. He was humble enough to hear that lessons (and grace) are learned (and found) in weakness and rejection. For when I am weak – I am strong.

This is not a swashbuckling mission.

I pray – even the dust on my shoes is holy in the kingdom of God.