

24 February 2008 Evensong WW

Psalm 40 Expectans expectavi
Joshua 1:1-9
Ephesians 6:10-20

Paul's passage about the armour of God is so famous that it was rather a heartsink moment when I saw that it had come my way. My mind went back to a sermon I preached here one morning about peace and the confusing messages that HS gives about it.

Clearly Paul expects his audience to be entirely familiar with the costume of warfare, and the notion of warfare, and I discovered yesterday that this can be no surprise. Paul was writing to his mates in Ephesus, now southern Turkey, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Then Greece, of course, one of the centres of Greek philosophy. Ephesus's most famous philosopher 500 years earlier was Heraclitus, whose writings, a bit like Paul's have come to us only as fragments (we don't know what provoked Paul to write these letters).

Logos: the principle underlying all things, the ordering principle of the world, the laws of nature, natural science perhaps

Heraclitus wrote

- Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one.
- Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Logos ...

Now, bearing in mind that logos can be translated as 'word', listen to this:

- In the beginning was logos, and logos was with God, and logos was God. Logos was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him was not anything made that was made.

Is it a coincidence that many scholars believe John's gospel was written in Ephesus? The connexion is startling to me: Heraclitus of Ephesus and logos; John's Gospel, probably written in Ephesus, and logos.

What has all this to do with the armour of God? Nothing. Or has it

You know how important local heroes are. Brian Clough in Derby, Florence Nightingale, Alan Bates in Bradbourne, Heraclitus in Ephesus, and it wouldn't surprise me if Paul knew all about Heraclitus, and knew that his readers would know all about Heraclitus. So now let's consider the armour of God, and warfare once again in the light of what Heraclitus wrote about war.

Heraclitus views strife or conflict as maintaining the world:

- war is the father of all things
- war is the father of all and king of all
- it is necessary to know that war (*polemos* – politics??) draws people together, and justice is strife and all living things come into being through strife and necessity

There is something there about fighting for justice.

War and killing feature much in Hebrew Scripture.

- In the Book of Deuteronomy we read: *Kill him. Be the first to stone him. And then let everyone else stone him too.* If we look a few verses back we understand who we must kill: *even your brother or your son or your daughter or the wife you love or your closest friend.* We are told we must be ready to kill the people closest to us.
- In Revelation Christ is described as a warrior: *Now repent, turn from your sin. Otherwise I will come to you soon and wage war against them with a sword that comes out of my mouth.*
- He is described as a warrior riding a white horse. *Out of His mouth came a sharp sword to strike the nations.*
- Christ is a warrior who is going to fight us and all nations for our sins. *His word has the power of a sword. This word will be a judge and fighter on the last day.*" (John 12:48)

War is indeed in our liturgy: Sabaoth, hosts, armies of God. Martial music. Dettingen and Utrecht Te Deum.

Maybe it's a different kind of warfare

- in Exodus 15:3,
 - Masoretic text: The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is His name
 - Septuagint: The Lord is crushing war.
- Isaiah 42:13
 - Masoretic text: The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man . . . like a man of war
 - Septuagint: The Lord God of hosts shall go forth, and crush the war
- Judith 9:7 and 16:3: God breaks the battles.

God is here the destroyer of war: God the destroyer, like Hindu Shiva, one of the Hindu trinity.

Jesus talks of peace. His words *peace be with you* remind us during the Liturgy that the condition of unity with God is peace with God. Jesus himself probably uttered these words as *Shalom aleichem*, and shalom in Hebrew means not simply a condition without war but being complete, being whole, a wholeness possible only in God. Healing, salvation. Wednesday night.

But maybe peace comes only with warfare, internal warfare, struggle, jihad.

Paul in tonight's letter, written while he was in chains, tells us to be ready for combat in order to achieve wholeness. We are called to inner peace - peace with God, peace with our brothers and sisters, peace with ourselves - and at the same time battle with the world because *the whole world lies in wickedness*. (1 John 5:19). Look at the public scandals, the mealy-mouthedness of those in power, the deception of the financiers and industrialists, the way each one of us deceives ourselves about ourselves and the truth is not in us.

I am more and more coming to the conclusion, however heretical it may be, that the Hebrew scholars who interpret *Deliver us from evil* to mean *deliver us from the evil part of ourselves* to be true. We must be at war, internal war, struggle against inner devils.

We need to go to war in order to clean out the stables. Lent, the time for a spiritual spring clean. This is what Paul's on about. And when we are finally let the God within expand to fill all our skins, then the militant will have been transformed into the triumphant. And our lights will shine out clear as the day, our faces radiant with that light.

Let us pray for the church militant, here on earth, and in our souls. When it has done its job, there will be no need for battle, warfare, struggle.