

Proper 14 Year C

Genesis 15:1-6
Psalm 33:12-22
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

I usually start thinking about a sermon on the previous Sunday afternoon as I'm in my groove on the sofa, dozing or whatever. 'What can I say next week that I haven't said already?' This is a bit of a problem because the gospel readings at the moment are variations on a theme, so the sermons are pretty much interchangeable. As I was pondering, into my head came the picture of David and Goliath. David the lad versus Goliath the hero. And David killed him! They weren't expecting that. What sticks in my mind is an easily missed detail in the build-up. Saul gives the young David all his armour because, presumably, he thinks the boy David has no chance without it. David tries it on and says 'no thanks, too heavy, I can't move in all this clobber, I'll be better without it'. That's the part of the David and Goliath story that I find arresting.

No armour. No preconceptions, no assumptions, no prejudgments. We spend a lot of time trying to make sure that our lives will be predictable. We try to control the future. We try to manipulate people so that they do things that we can cope with. Is this because we want to feel powerful, as if we're the boss, or because we're so afraid that we can't cope unless things happen in a certain way? Maybe those are the same. All bullies are actually afraid: that's why they bully. Either way, we want to feel that we're in charge. The trouble is that if we're *in charge* like that, we're not open to inspiration, we're not flexible, we're not responsive to changing needs. Think how many businesses go under because they are not responsive and so can't cope with change. It's just the same.

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If we are to *live*, as opposed merely to exist, it's this flexibility that we need. We need to resist the temptation to dress ourselves in restrictive armour: David ditched 'all this clobber' and marched off to meet Goliath full of confidence that since he could deal with lions and bears that attacked his sheep, he wouldn't have any difficulty in decking the big man. And he was right. We need to take the risk, like David did, of stepping out without conditions, restrictions, safety nets, assumptions, efforts to manipulate. In Christian-speak you'd say that the Lord wants us to trust him enough to live with him unafraid, totally defenceless in his presence. The ancient Greek word for this is *pistis*, and in Greek mythology *Pistis* was the personification of good faith, trust and reliability. *Pistis* is the intellectual and emotional acceptance of a proposition. It's a decision. *Faith is a decision. We decide to trust.*

Trust in the uncertainty of life. Trust not to be fearful of possibilities. Work with the cosmos, don't fight it. Part of me would love to fight with the silliness of the institutional church and institutionalized people in it, but there's no point. Let them at it. For us all, it means working with what we've got and enjoying it while it lasts. And if it goes before we do, we work with something else rather than moan how good things used to be—an empty-headed activity according to Ecclesiastes (in the Bible so it must be true). Let go of trying to control. Let go of what 'I' want. Let go of 'ego'. 'Do not be afraid'. Step out, be ready, be alert to possibilities, be responsive. This means having faith in, trusting in, our own personal ability to make decisions as circumstances arise. In my theology, this means making contact with, and having faith in, the inner divine core, the boy David within each of us. This brings us on the road to holiness.

At Christmas we sing 'O holy Child of Bethlehem, be born in us today.' We can sing it every day.

Life is messy and unpredictable. Despite what anyone may tell us, or what we in the privileged West may think, we are *not* in control. We simply don't know what's around the corner. 'Live each day as if 'twere thy last' – a recurring message. Acceptance of uncertainty is the key to living in the moment, and living in the moment is the key to eternal life—*eternal* being a quality of life outside time, not *everlasting*. And when we acknowledge our powerlessness, and discard attachments, there is nothing left for us to stand on our dignity about, so pride (hubris) goes too. Think how much better the world would be without that sort of pride, based as it is on the notion that 'I'm better than you'.

I know—this is hard. I say these things not because I'm good at them, but because I'd like to be. But we've got to start on this journey of trust sometime, and the right time is always *now*, before it's too late. Bronnie Ware, a nurse working in palliative care, recently wrote *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*, a book based on her experience. Here they are (my summaries, not hers):

- *I wish I'd had the courage to live my life rather than the life others expected of me.* Most people die knowing that their lives have been limited by their choices.
- *I wish I hadn't worked so hard.* This came from every man the author nursed. It is true for me. I missed a good deal of my children's youth and Susan's companionship.
- *I wish I'd had the courage to say what I felt.* Many people don't say what they think in an attempt to keep peace. They settle for a mediocrity. The frustration, bitterness and resentment that build up inside can cause heart disease and cancer.
- *I wish I'd stayed in touch with friends.*
- *I wish I'd let myself be happier.* Happiness is a choice. Misery is a choice. People stay stuck in old habits. Fear of change makes us pretend to others and to ourselves that we are content, when deep within, we long to laugh and be silly. There is not enough innocent silliness in this world.

So there you are! Ditch the *notions*. Trust in uncertainty. Be silly.