

Toetrede

Liturgie van die Lig

Woorddiens

Lesing 1: Handeling 4:5-12

Lesing 2: Psalm 23 (1953)

¹ 'n PSALM van Dawid. Die HERE is my herder; niks sal my ontbreek nie.

² Hy laat my neerlê in groen weivelde; na waters waar rus is, lei Hy my heen.

³ Hy verkwik my siel; Hy lei my in die spore van geregtigheid, om sy Naam ontwil.

⁴ Al gaan ek ook in 'n dal van doodskaduwee, ek sal geen onheil vrees nie; want U is met my: u stok en u staf dié vertroos my.

⁵ U berei die tafel voor my aangesig teenoor my teëstanders; U maak my hoof vet met olie; my beker loop oor.

⁶ Net goedheid en guns sal my volg al die dae van my lewe; en ek sal in die huis van die HERE bly in lengte van dae.

Broodjies vir die Pad

Uittreksel uit die "Steve de Gruchy Gedenklesing" deur Emeritus Aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu (24/4/2012)

Now wouldn't most normal people have said "Wow, this man is priceless – worth his weight in platinum. He is almost indispensable in an evolving South Africa that wants to be free, democratic, non racial, non sexist? This one who had experienced a Pilgrimage of Hope had worked where we could see the devastation caused by policies obsessed with race instead of caring for people as human beings, with a brilliant intellect, who realized just how vulnerable our natural environment is – would you not want to draft him into your team?" But it seems God thinks quite differently. That dear friends is what provoked the title of this commemorative lecture. **God is God's Worst Enemy.**

What would the Roman Catholic Church have looked like had Pope John 23 lived to see Vatican 2 to its logical conclusion? What would have been the state of ecumenical relations? We obviously don't really know but could extrapolate and conjecture and say it is reasonable to think that they would have been other than they are today. But Pope John's life was cut tragically short. We could multiply examples – John F Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr, Mahatma Gandhi, Chris Hani, Robert Sobukhwe, Steve Biko etc, etc. Do you understand the reason for my title?

Further Evidence

Let us start with the biblical evidence. Virtually all those who are the stars in God's drama are flawed,

some almost to the point of nullifying their good attributes. None of those playing in God's team is without blemish. Joseph, his doting father's pampered favourite must have been a pain in the neck as he revelled in telling the stories of his dreams predicting his future prominence when his older brothers would end up fulfilling his dream predictions by their obsequious fawning. His aging father, Jacob was no better having cheated his famished brother Esau of his birthright with the help of a colluding mother both willing to deceive an ailing old man virtually on his death bed. Even their ancestor Abraham who was God's friend thought nothing of passing off his wife Sarah as his sister to save his own skin. Moses had a foul temper. He smashed the tablets on which God had inscribed the Decalogue because he saw the Israelites dancing around the golden calf which his brother Aaron said had emerged marvellously from the molten precious stones he had thrown into the fire. David had been almost immaculate until he espied Bathsheba bathing and committed adultery with her and arranged for the killing of her husband Uriah. Don't you think Elijah remarkably courageous standing up as he did for Yahweh against Queen Jezebel and her conniving husband King Ahab insisting that Yahweh alone was Israel's God? But would you not agree sadly that he blotted his copybook spectacularly when he presided over the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. Would you not feel much the same about Samuel and Saul? Saul seems a much nicer person for sparing Agag while Samuel speaking for God is so bloodthirsty as he hacks Agag ruthlessly to death with all his household.

It really is not much better in the New Testament. It is one of his own disciples who betrays Our Lord and another, who was to become the chief of the apostles denied his master not once but three times. And they all abandoned Him, leaving Him in the lurch. The one who was to become the leading evangelist and theologian of the new movement started out as a persecutor of the movement he was to promote and even after his conversion was forever engaging in self justification.

And just think of the Crusades, the Inquisition, the burning of heretics at the stake. Christians, Muslims and believers in some deity or other have been responsible for slavery, lynching, for the Holocaust, for apartheid etc.

Someone observed that God's servants were programmed to fail. It is in the texture, the make up of this universe that there will be suffering and failure and distress, a feature of the nature of things that evokes the heartrending, anguished cries "But why" or "But why me/us Lord?" Could this universe not have been planned differently to work out in a way that did not inflict so much and so frequently seemingly gratuitous suffering? St Theresa of Avila is reported as observing to God " No wonder your friends are so few considering how you treat them!" We learn too how Mother Teresa of Calcutta

experienced agonizing desolation in her prayer life for most of her life.

Why, Why?

We have heard or even ourselves uttered the agonizing cry "But why...." In an ultimate sense I really don't know. In the end for me as for most of us it is a mystery and I have to accept that I must have a reverent agnosticism. Why did God create precisely this sort of universe? I would have to be God to know the ultimate answer. But there are things that I have noted. Why would a good God permit such atrocities to happen when they happen? Most of us have our understanding of power. Most of us reckon it does mean not being frustrated in achieving your purpose. We have been socialized to understand that power enables you to get what you want when you want. We cannot really understand an omnipotence that can be frustrated in achieving its goal. It is one of the abiding mysteries that there can be the oxymoron of a weak omnipotence. But I think this is the wonder of the God we worship, that God says "I gave you a gift, the gift of free will and I will respect that gift". God would not use God's power to compel us to choose the right. We really are free to choose, to commit the horror of a genocide or whatever. And God will sit there weeping, making available God's grace to enable us to choose the right. But it is grace, it is a gift which we are free to accept or refuse. It would be contrary to God's nature to ram God's gift down our throats. It would no longer be a gift. This God does behave oddly. God chooses not the powerful achieving ones, God chooses a motley group of slaves to be eventually God's Chosen People to accomplish God's purpose for the world. This is a God who sides with the poor, the downtrodden, the despised. That is not the way of the world. Those God chooses are not deserving. It is grace, it is a free, unearned, unearnable gift, for which no one can be worthy. The Christ died for us whilst we were yet sinners, not when we were die able for – no precisely when we did not deserve it was when God's gift came. It is an extraordinary set up. **The Good Shepherd goes not after the good sheep, not after the cuddly lamb as most of our pictures depict him. He leaves the perfectly well behaved sheep to go and find the obstreperous ram which, having found it, He carries joyfully on His shoulder home. And Jesus pronounces quite categorically that there is in this God's heaven more joy over the one sinner who repents than over the ninety nine who needed no repentance.**

There are other standards at work here. One might say "Couldn't God have created a pain free universe?" I don't know what it would have been like – how would we have learned to be compassionate, gentle and caring if there were none of those whose suffering evoked those attributes in us? Would a Nelson Mandela have evolved into the magnanimous moral giant he has become without the twenty seven years of anguish and imprisonment? He went to prison an angry Commander in Chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's armed wing, believing in the efficacy of violence. The 27 years of imprisonment burned away the dross and he emerged to become the icon of

forgiveness and reconciliation and is rightly feted by the entire globe. Would this metamorphosis have been possible without the anguish of 27 years imprisonment?

God has placed us in this universe and it is a universe precisely because it isn't chaos and has laws that make it possible for those who live in it knowing to plan, to predict what to expect – that if a baby fell out of a window gravity would send it crashing to the ground and not miraculously to float upwards. Why did God not suspend that law to save the baby? If gravity was suspended we would have a chaos happening. The regularity of nature enables us to plan ahead knowing on the whole what is going to happen, but it comes at a cost, that generally miracles will not happen that see a suspension of the natural laws.

The Mystery of God

Looking at what has happened as we have made a mess of living in God's world, God has not given good advice from a safe distance; God has staggered us by entering the fiery furnace because God is Immanuel, God with us. God with us in joy and in sorrow, in light and in darkness, in success and in failure, in life and in death, this God comes down and participates in our entire existence – this God is born and lives as one of us, the life of the poor and despised and dies, the immortal dies and we are called to share this eternal life. I don't understand it. I just accept it. Julian of Norwich concerned about the fate of sin is assured that God will make all things well.

I want to end this by quoting a poem by Isobel who has written an anthology "Making all Well" inspired by her reading of Julian's Revelations of divine love.

Poem 68 You will not be Overcome – Isobel de Gruchy

In my deep distress, O Lord
I turned to your promises:
I shouted them to you:
I flung them back at you:

"The Lord protects you;"
"The Lord will deliver you,"
"No evil will befall you,
for his angels will bear you up
so that you do not dash your foot
against the stone."

I clung to these, o Lord,
but there was no protection;
no deliverance – no angels
to lift our son up – only the stones
dashing his head – the waters covering him,
death claiming him.

What about your promises-
O Lord, where were you?

Then I remembered those other promises:
Promises that Jesus made:

"The gate is narrow and the way hard."

"You have a cross to carry daily."

"The world will hate you."

For he did not say,

"You will not be tempted,

You will not be troubled,

You will not be distressed."

But he did promise,

"You will not be overcome."

No easy ride, no special privileges,

Cling only to his promise to love you:

Whether things are going well,

or, everything is falling apart,

be strong in your faithful trust,

For you will not be overcome.

<http://christianspirit.co.za/2012/04/26/steve-de-gruchy-memorial-lecture-by-desmond-tutu>

Brood vir die Pad

Prewel saggies soos 'n priester

deur Wilhelm Jordaan

Op 'n Sondag soek ek leesstof oor die Apostoliese Geloofsbelydenis en kom toe af op die Latynse weergawe daarvan. Ek prewel dit saggies, soos 'n priester sou doen: "*Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem, Creatorem caeli et terrae, / et in Iesum Christum, Fillium Eius unicum, Dominum nostrum...*"

En opeens is ek bedroef én onthuts. Onthuts omdat die vreemde klanke van 'n uitgestorwe taal my meevoer op 'n manier wat my moedertaal se bewoording dit nie doen nie. En bedroef omdat dit my verlangend laat dink aan lank-lank gelede toe alles so eenvoudig was en maklik om te glo.

In 'n breër geloofsraam het sulke belewenisse te doen met die spanning tussen tradisie en vernuwing. Sondae in die kerk bely mens hardop of saggies die tradisionele eeue oue Apostoliese Geloofsbelydenis. Terselfdertyd weet mens baie gelowiges doen dit terwyl hulle die letterlike waarheid daarvan lankal nie meer aanvaar nie, of as lewensvreemd beleef. Beteken dit sulke mense is vals in hul geloof? Is daar plek in die kerk vir sulke "gelowiges"? Is daar vir hulle plek in God se Koninkryk?

Tog, reken ek, dit is fout om vernuwend te denke en spreke oor geloof te verstaan as die verwerping van jou geloofsgeskiedenis, soos die tradisie dit gevorm het. 'n Manier om versusdenke oor tradisie en vernuwing op te hef, is om 'n paradoksale bewussyn oor geloofsake te ontwikkel. Dit gebeur wanneer jy leer om "én-én" te dink eerder as "óf-óf"; dat dit 'n geval is van tradisie én vernuwing, 'n "ja" vir albei. Daaruit kom die belewenis van harmonie tussen oënskynlik onversoembare alternatiewe. Terselfdertyd groei die kapasiteit om saam te leef met teenstrydigheid en dubbelsinnigheid.

Paradoksale bewussyn oor die Apostoliese Geloofsbelydenis behels dan iets soos: Enersyds roer dié belydenis my en hou die verlange na God brandend. Dit is die geloofspad waarlangs die kerkvaders dit eeue gelede begryp het, en waarlangs ek ook gekom het van moedersknie af.

Ek kan my hierin verbly en kan dit met oortuiging nasê as kosbare geloofsvormende geskiedenis waarsonder ek nie wil wees nie. Andersyds, en terselfdertyd: Ek glo die misterie rondom die idee van God is ontvouend en dit laat my toe om met altyd soekende en verantwoordbare verwondering nuwe geloofsinhoud te ontdek wat my die troos bring dat ek nie buite geloof staan nie.

Paradoksale bewussyn help mens om die volgende te verstaan: Elke vroeëre of latere belydenisskrif, elke biddende stameling, elke vlugtige gedagte, elke snik in 'n donker uur, elke onrustige gevoel, elke huiwerende insig, elke flentertjie twyfel en angsvolle buitelanderskap wat bemoeienis maak met die samehang van God en die man van Nasaret is 'n toelaatbare antwoord op 'n vraag van Jesus aan sy dissipels: "Wie sê die mense is ek?"

Dan sê hulle vir hom.

En Hy vra op sy sagte, reguit manier: "Maar julle, wie sê julle is Ek?". Dit is 'n ope uitnodiging wat verby al die eeue aan ons gerig word. Dit maak baie soorte antwoorde toelaatbaar soos dit beïnvloed word deur jou unieke geloofsreis, jou lewensondervinding, kennis, begrip en temperament.

Natuurlik is "nuwe geloofsinhoud" 'n waagstuk, want jy word ingetrek in 'n taalspel van onsekerheid teenoor die geproklameerde sekerhede van tradisie. Nuwe maniere van praat oor geloof maak nie aanspraak op groter korrektheid nie, maar kan verstaan word as aanvullende, voorlopige maniere om sin aan jou geloof te gee in vandag se wêreld.

Die Katolieke teoloog Hans Küng se opvatting help in dié verband: "The totality of faith consists in the integrity of commitment, not in completely correct propositions. And that commitment can be entire and unreserved even though something false is said at the same time."

Daarmee as vertrekpunt word geloof soos 'n kristal wat elke keer met die optel daarvan nuwe konfigurasies van lig en kleur deurlaat, eerder as om geloof te verstaan as 'n fokus op 'n onveranderlike vaste punt waarby jy eenmalig in jou lewe arriveer.

Wegsending

Liefdegawes

Mededelings

Doof van die Kerse

Seën

wynandnel@iafrica.com

082 901 5877