

Proper 12, Year B  
July 28, 2024

We folks who find ourselves in the pulpit are often discouraged – if not forbidden in some dioceses - from “getting too political.” I’m new in the Diocese of Vermont, so I don’t want to get into too much trouble just yet, nor do I want to make trouble for Father Paul and St Stephen’s. That being said, deliberately placing a rival in the arms of death for one’s personal gain seems to be a lesson we have learned well over the centuries and continue to fine-tune. As in the days of David the King, we are able to justify this behavior as rooted somehow in obedience to God. And how convenient for us that our collect for the day might be interpreted by some as cheering this on: without God, nothing is holy. So, if we lovingly insert “God” into whatever temporal nastiness we come up with, and at the same time have one eye focused on those things eternal, we’ve escaped unscathed. David decided that Bathsheba was his, and if he had to eliminate her husband by sending him to the front line to fight for God’s chosen, then so be it. One should certainly note her complicity in the situation, or at least lack of protest. I’m silently counting in the back of my mind how many of the Ten Commandments the two of them have broken in this story: pretty much all ten.

The tree in the middle of that meadow belongs to my family. Generations ago, when we sold the property to the adjoining farm, we agreed that it would never be cut down: trimmed as necessary for its health, but left alone. Actually, they sold it to us along with the meadow; what possible sense does it make to sell a piece of property and not include a tree? The bill of sale states that all agree we will respect and leave the tree, as long as it remains healthy. But it’s our tree. I’m a brother at the Abbey of St Simeon sixteen miles north of here; I don’t mean to cause trouble, but years before that meadow exchanged

hands, it was the property of the Abbey *in perpetui*. We actually leased the property, so it was not the lessee's property to sell in the first place. The tree and the meadow belong to the Abbey.

(Never trust anyone who says they don't want to cause trouble.)

I have been speaking with my son, a real estate attorney, who says the "tree clause" in the bill of sale is binding.

My cousin is an arborist and says that tree is infected with bacterial leaf scorch and must either be treated immediately or will have to be taken down for the sake of other trees on the property.

Wait! This tree is sacred to our Abbey; legend has it that our own St Simeon rested under that very tree as he made his way through the countryside.

That tree will not come down: it is my tree. I will move heaven and earth to save that tree. I will fight to the death for that tree. I will kill to save that tree.

You're saying we will settle this with bullets? So be it!

Let the games begin.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chicks under her wings, and ye would not! O sacred people. All tribes - every nation and people under the sun - we are all of us children of God. Let us bow the knee before the Holy One, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. May we all trust in you, for without you, nothing is strong, nothing is holy.

Here we are in a green pasture, where we have been led by the Holy One; let us listen to what is being said. A teenager offers his fish and barley bread to all of us. We share with people we have never seen, as well as with folks we have known all our lives. We are seated together as one body, even near people we have sensed didn't like us or folks we thought we should be afraid of. As we eat, we exchange stories of our families, our troubles, our sorrows, our lives, our deaths. All of us are different, but we are much the same. There's plenty of space to sit and plenty of food to satisfy hunger. Why am I not hungry anymore? Is it the

food or could it be the comfort of being with others where strangers now are friends? There is joy in this place. Come away and rest. Although I have never used a gun, apparently solving a problem by eliminating it with the squeeze of a trigger has become the default for many, never mind the so-called collateral damage. Trying to understand another culture or tribe's point of view, to unravel life's complications by sitting and listening takes way too much time and effort. Although in many ways, social media has brought us closer together, it has a way of de-sensitizing us by its never-ending streaming of violent images and starving children. We cannot look away, and, after all, it is over there, not on our shores, not real for us but for them. If we pray hard enough, if we compose letters to congress, if we protest, if we hang flags, then we've done what we are able and can sleep at night. This is not to say we shouldn't do those things.

But we can and we must do more. We can look to *ourselves* and our *own* lives, rather than targeting others' behavior; we can pray to God to multiply upon *us* God's mercy; we can pray that God grace *each one of us* with a deeper understanding of those in *our* lives we don't especially like: how do we treat them, how do we speak to them; *do* we speak to them? We've all heard the bit about throwing the stone into the pool of water, the rings ever-expanding. Seemingly insignificant words and actions in our own seemingly insignificant lives make a difference. We can change the world with our personal feelings of dislike and disregard just as we can change the world with the Love of Jesus Christ.

After all, there were only five loaves and two fish.