



TCH23

23rd Sunday Ordinary Time Aiii – Excerpts From Ezekiel 33, Romans 13, Matthew 18

The Royal Family

This weekend Jesus causes us to reflect on our original calling, to be God's royal image bearers, ruling with him, in love, over creation.
Fr David King – 30th August 2020

You will benefit greatly from reading through the Gospel before reading this (Matthew 18.15-20)

1. Beelzebub

Sadly, I don't remember much from my lessons at school, most of it is a bit of a blur. But I do remember a few things, it's funny what sticks in your mind... But also, in our English classes, we once had to study 'Lord of the Flies' and I definitely remember that. Some of you may be familiar with that book, some of you won't be (which is fine as I'll tell you a little bit about it) but it may provide a good starting point for today.

- 'Lord of the Flies' is a novel by William Golding and its premise is really quite interesting. During the war, a British plane crashes near a remote island in the Pacific Ocean. The only survivors are a group of school-boys, some of whom are choir-boys even. The boys realise they have to survive on this island until they are rescued, so they go about trying to get a few things organised.
- A boy called Ralph begins to take charge a bit and the boys elect him their leader, only he didn't get the votes of a few of the boys in the choir, who seem to be under the influence of a boy named Jack.
- At first, things go really well, they begin by sensibly making some shelters, they agree to keep a smoke signal going so any passing ships will see them, and everything looks quite organised. But then, very slowly, a few cracks begin to appear in their burgeoning society.
 - One of the boys called Piggy very quickly becomes the butt of all their jokes which really gets to him, some of the others start developing a slight paranoia about parts of the island that they haven't explored yet, and one of the more quiet, perceptive members of the group begins to realise that this utopia might not last for that long.
- Sure enough, after a while, their little slice of paradise very quickly descends into a full-blown nightmare. Jack's influence on the group grows stronger and they split into two camps, they lose focus on the important tasks – food and shelter – and the paranoia among them grows as they all begin to believe that a 'beast' dwells on the island who is out to get them all, though as the reader you are all too aware of the irony; there is no beast, except, of course, the one within them all.
- They slide ever deeper into this chaos, becoming more and more animal like, until it all tragically culminates in the death of Simon, the quiet one, who saw where all this was headed from the start.
- The book has a fascinating ending, just when things are beginning to unravel completely, a ship turns up, and in the presence of an adult they all instantly revert to being innocent children again. It's a fascinating study of human nature.

2. Gospel

- Now, hopefully, we are not that bad (though maybe we are?), but it's quite common these days to have, what we might call a 'low anthropology', that is a low view of human beings, as just being the products of evolution, slightly more intelligent animals, but nothing more than that.
- One glance at this Gospel would tell you instantly that Jesus would disagree with this. He's hardly saying 'You lot are pretty awful at heart, so I'm just gonna leave you to it, you can get on with it, and what will be will be'
- No! Jesus talks of reconciliation here, he cares about how we conduct ourselves and clearly believes we are capable of rising above any primitive instincts we have inside. He even goes on to talk of us making the rules here on earth – that will apply in heaven too! A huge responsibility! Jesus, we might say, has a very '*high anthropology*'. And of course he does! The Judeo-Christian tradition has, at its very centre, the belief that we human beings are made in the image of God.
- Right at the start of the Book of Genesis, humans are created as royalty, as kings and queens! You may not have noticed that before, but twice we are told to 'have dominion' over creation. That's royal language, with royal connotations.
 - We were created to be God's royal image bearers in the world. To reflect him to the world, and the world back to him. To rule in the world on his behalf, as his partners. It is an absolutely beautiful, wonderful vision of humanity. And all the more incredible when you think about when it was written.
- Now, obviously, if you know the story, you'll know that we completely stuffed that up and within two seconds were at each other's throats; Cain & Abel etc., but that doesn't take away from the fact that that was always the intention. In fact, the fact that we made a mess of it helps us to make sense of the Gospel, Jesus is teaching us here how to fulfil our original calling. He knows we've gone astray, so he's calling us back to what we were made for. Calling us to be good stewards of our relationships, to rule wisely in the world with compassion and right judgement.

3. Today

- Now, I don't know about you, but I believe in our high calling, I believe in humanity. I believe we *are* made in the image of God, to be his image bearers in the world. But I also believe we are clearly really struggling with the opinion we have of ourselves at the moment. We seem to be losing our ambition for who we can become as humans, for who we are.
 - And this thirst for violence that we've seen recently, across the whole political and social spectrum strikes me of us just reverting to our animal instincts, of us having no ambition.
- Never before have been in such a need of a Rabbi, a teacher who can remind us of what and who we were made to be, and how to get there. Thank God for Jesus! His words are so relevant. He calls us not to give up on proper dialogue, to embrace the responsibilities that we have been given as human beings, and not to forget that prayer is there as a constant aid.
- The message today is clear; Jesus is calling us back to our original vocation. We were made to be the royal image bearers of God, ruling, in partnership with him over creation. And of course Jesus not only spells this out, but is standing there as the supreme example of what this looks like.

Jesus, thank you for believing in me, help me to reflect deeply on who you are calling me to be.