

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – November 22, 2015 – Thanksgiving
Sunday – Pilgrimage to the Manger
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

2 Samuel 23:1-7

REFLECTION

**“In every crowd are certain persons who seem just like the rest,
yet they bear amazing messages.”**

~ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Night Flight

"The soul can split the sky in two and let the face of God shine through."

~ Edna St. Vincent Millay
<http://www.quotegarden.com/god.html>

Speaking for G-d

If a person claims to be speaking for G-d – you can be sure they are not – or you can host all kinds of suspicions about the message – or you can believe them and see where that takes you. We are free to choose our response – which gives us enormous power in the world.

It is true that in the 10th century B.C.E. when this poem was written – it was important to strengthen one’s credentials with divine backing. So King David had a back story that indicated he was anointed by G-d – favored and chosen – with some innate skills like being able to slay giants with rocks. David was a seriously flawed individual – committed adultery and murder – had a few profound arguments with G-d and G-d’s spokesmen. But they all worked it out and David was a good and beloved king in the long run.

And, to be fair, he didn’t write this passage. If these really were “last words” – someone else wrote them down and could have easily inserted the claim to speak for G-d. Or these really were his last words and he really did believe that G-d spoke through him. Either way, this is poetry and it is beautiful – even in English.

The main point of the poem is to expound on the simile: G-d is like the sun after the rain – helping healthy plants to grow and burning up the thorns. And the simile seems to imply that faithful people flourish – and others don’t – a theology of “G-d blessing the worthy with wealth and power” that lingers to this day. So I’m inclined to believe that

the person who wrote this poem – David or a David supporter – was speaking out of self-interest rather than divine inspiration. But what do I know? G-d doesn't speak English or Greek or Hebrew in my head. And I don't speak for G-d.

On the other hand, I believe there ARE people – especially flawed people – who speak for G-d. But, like the planet itself, they don't make claims – they just ARE the message when they can be. Even Jesus – acted out the Beloved Community – and then other people made claims of divinity on his behalf. I'm thinking he would be embarrassed and even angry about much of his legacy. But what do I know about Jesus' feelings? I can hardly get a grip on my own.

People who actually do speak for G-d – I believe – are people who say and do stuff that make a whole lot of divine sense to me – but don't necessarily claim to be speaking for G-d. That's probably true for everyone – that if I agree with the person's politics and point of view – then they must be on G-d's side – because I'm on G-d's side – or I think I am – or want to be and am trying.

But there is something to be said for appreciating people who share your values and actually speak and live out of those values consistently.

In today's circumstances, for me:

These would be French citizens who sing and light candles in the aftermath of terrorist attacks.

These would be citizens of Mali who pray for the souls of the dead hotel guests and staff and terrorists rather than seek revenge.

These would be people who shame (and hopefully unseat) those politicians that would reject refugees from war and terror because a wolf could be in sheep's clothing – people who insist on helping the homeless and desperate no matter what their religion or origin.

One woman saw news footage of Syrian refugees struggling to carry their babies and toddlers as they disembarked in Greece – and has created a way to get baby carriers to these families. Here's a link if you want to donate to the project.

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/10-000-baby-carriers-for-refugees-in-greece#/>

Other prophetic people on my list would be the tireless and tiring educators and activists who have been intervening in the education of young people – giving them something to hope for and an alternative to violent ideologies – hoping to deter future generations from joining Islamic State and Al Qaeda and other pathological organizations.

People who speak for G-d, in my opinion, share their largess (or their pittance) – not just on Thanksgiving and Christmas – but whenever they can throughout the year.

They teach and work for non-profits and use art to transform society.

They mediate conflicts, foster children and animals, and set up therapy practices in prisons.

They choose life, save lives, improve lives, live meaningful lives.

People who speak for G-d follow the advice of St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel and, when necessary, use words.”

And, from what I’ve seen, these people are not perfect. Like any super hero, they have character flaws and make mistakes – even big ones. But they get up each morning and make choices about how they might overpower their flaws and do some good in the world anyway.

Have you known anyone like this? How did you recognize them?
Have they been role models for you? How have they affected your life?

In the midst of darkness, these people have been lights – shining that poetic G-d-light in ways that create rather than destroy – in ways that repair and heal rather than divide and conquer. Those who act and speak for G-d are:

... like the light of morning,
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

On this day of Thanksgiving, we lift them up and give thanks for their lives – and the ways in which they have touched and transformed the lives of others.

2 Samuel 23:1-7

1 Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel:

2 The spirit of the LORD speaks through me,
his word is upon my tongue.

3 The God of Israel has spoken,
the Rock of Israel has said to me:

One who rules over people justly,
ruling in the fear of God,

4 is like the light of morning,
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

5 Is not my house like this with God?

For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure.

Will he not cause to prosper
all my help and my desire?

6 But the godless are all like thorns that are thrown away;
for they cannot be picked up with the hand;

7 to touch them one uses an iron bar
or the shaft of a spear.

And they are entirely
consumed in fire on the spot.

Notes:

Poem 10th c, B.C.E.

“Ordered in all things and secure” – legal language of covenant