

St Columba
Lent 3, 15th March 2009
Susan Adams

Exodus 20: 1-17

John 2: 13-22

God's Law: Church Practice!

Who's Angry Now?

I was so angry this week I stomped around the house speechless!
It is not often I am without words but it took me some time before I could find my voice to even let out a holler!

All I could say was 'how dare they!'
who do they think they are!
What sort of Christianity is that!
The fiends
It's terrible!.... and other less polite things!

And my email inbox has been running hot as women from around the world also explode in anger and connect with other women seeking an outlet for their indignation!

The reason for it all was the action by the Bishop in Brazil, reported in NZ in Monday's Herald this week, to excommunicate a 9 year old girl, her sister and her Mother, because the Mother supported her daughter through the termination of a pregnancy resulting from rape by her stepfather. The stepfather had also abused the sister.
The Bishop was acting in accordance with Roman Catholic Church law that has an automatic excommunication for anyone violating these laws. Abortion is a crime so severe that no one has to impose it – there is no case to be heard – it is automatic.

Where is compassion and love here for a little girl and her mother and sister living in such a terrible situation? What Mother could not support her little girl in the face of such violation to her small body? Where is compassion and love here in the face of such abominable behaviour by a man who has a position of care and trust in their lives? How could this Bishop compound the horror by removing this mother and her daughters from their spiritual support?

It was not difficult for me to connect with the intensity of emotion that Jesus expresses when he storms into the Temple courtyard and over turns the tables of the moneychangers and drives out the animals shouting "Get these things out of here and stop making God's house a marketplace!"

This is no polite, gentle Jesus in this story! And after his death his disciples were remembering the incident. I dare say remembering his very angry response to the disrespectful and inappropriate goings on. Jesus was furious at the way the temple priests and hierarchy were

distorting the intentions of God's law intended protect and save, to restore and bring freedom and life with human rules and practices of convenience.

Could there be any starker illustration in our own day of the same distortions that that of the little Brazilian girl and her family.

There is so much waffle preached about the God's law and its life-giving and saving wisdom!

Umm, I say, but who implements the law? And who guards it against distortions and malpractice? And who ensures that the words we speak about it reflect a positive understanding of God's love and our just and compassionate responsibility for each other?

In their day the Ten Commandments were clear and unambiguous about how to live in a particular culture in the face of other cultures, without being corrupted and losing identity. They were certainly socially advanced and liberating - in their day!

But this is different day and our temptations and dangers are somewhat different and the pressures of social dysfunction and breakdown even more intense. We need the clarity of the laws as presented in the 10 commandments...there are time and situations clearly where we need the force of you shall and you shall not...rather than the "I invite you,...or we need..."that we find more comfortable because we do not feel compelled to take much notice.

I want to say very clearly

'You shall not rape your women; you shall not abuse your daughters or your sons'

'You will learn compassion; you will protect the weak and the vulnerable'

I want there to be no doubt, as the disciples were in no doubt, that as Jesus was angry, so we too must be angry and outraged where we see life treated cheaply and our vulnerable children and others who are the 'little ones' in our society abused. Our anger and outrage must demand change. And those changes must be reflected in our political and economic issues as well as our personal actions.

If we are to live in a covenant relationship with God such as we have been hearing about over the last couple of weeks, if we are to follow the risky path of discipleship demanding justice and righteousness then we must touch the pain stories such as this bring to us. We must be outraged. And then, be bold in our response. "Is there anyone among you who if your child asks for bread will give a stone?"(Matt7:9). Bread is life, we must be life bringers, hope sustainers, God's partners in loving justice.

Beware those who please themselves how they remember the laws of God and the teachings of Jesus. It is written "you shall not make wrongful use of the name of your God, for God will not acquit anyone who misuses his name" (Ex 20:7)

Think about it!

