

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #81

READING I 1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

A reading from the first Book of Samuel

In those days, Saul went down to the desert of Ziph with **three thousand** picked men of Israel, to search for **David** in the desert of Ziph.

So **David** and **Abishai** went among Saul's soldiers **by night** and **found** Saul lying **asleep** within the barricade, with his spear **thrust into the ground** at his **head** and Abner and his men **sleeping** around him.

Abishai whispered to David:

"God has delivered your enemy into your grasp this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need a second thrust!"

But **David** said to Abishai, **"Do not harm him, for who can lay hands on the LORD'S anointed and remain unpunished?"**

So David **took the spear** and the **water jug** from their place at **Saul's head**, and they **got away** without anyone's **seeing or knowing or awakening**.

All remained **asleep**, because the **LORD** had put them into a deep **slumber**.

Going across to an opposite slope,

David stood on a remote **hilltop**

at a great distance from Abner, son of Ner, and the troops.

Ziph = zif

For drama alone, the story simmers with energy; yet there is more added as emotions run even higher because the potential victim, Saul, is the king—that is, "the Lord's anointed."

Abishai = uh-Bī-shī

The mystery of the sleeping soldiers will be solved later in the reading, so allow a note of unbelief in your voice here.

The two men are still in grave danger. Pick up your pace slightly, leading to the resolution of the mystery of the deep sleep.

Ner = nuhr

READING I

What does it mean to act from one's best self? Today's readings imply that such integrity is best exemplified in moments of testing, whether the test is part of an unfolding divine plan or simply the integrity required to be a steadfast disciple of the kingdom.

1 Samuel is one of six books that form the Deuteronomistic History: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. After forty years in the wilderness and two hundred years of conquering and settling Canaan (Joshua and Judges), Israelite society was chaotic, violent, and leaderless.

1 Samuel describes the subsequent period when two key institutions developed in Israel: prophecy and monarchy. Taking a chronological approach, the book first describes the natural merger of several roles into one: Samuel, the final judge and a priest apprentice to Eli, emerges as the prophet. With Samuel in place, the second institution, the monarchy, emerges from ambivalent origins with Saul as Israel's first king.

Despite its historical tone, 1 Samuel is primarily a theological work and asserts that God chooses leaders. Thus, no political

process or human intrigue can undo God's choice for Israel's king. Consequently, even Samuel is taken aback when God sends him to Bethlehem to anoint David as king, while Saul is still ruling. Such a situation cannot last, and the relationship between Saul and David deteriorates rapidly, leading to today's reading, their final encounter.

Desperate to eliminate his rival David, Saul and his forces search for David and those loyal to him in an account that is told twice, in chapters 24 and 26, with slight variations. The account's most significant contribution to the story is to reassert

He said: "Here is the **king's spear**.
 Let an attendant **come over to get it**.
 The **LORD** will reward each man for his **justice and faithfulness**.
 Today, though the **LORD delivered you into my grasp**,
 I would **not harm the LORD's anointed**."

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13 (8a)

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

Bless the **LORD**, O my soul;
 all my being, bless his holy name.
 Bless the **LORD**, O my soul,
 and forget not all his benefits.

He pardons all your iniquities,
 heals all your ills.
 He redeems your life from destruction,
 crowns you with kindness
 and compassion.

Merciful and gracious is the **LORD**,
 slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
 Not according to our sins does
 he deal with us,
 nor does he requite us according to
 our crimes.

As far as the east is from the west,
 so far has he put our transgressions
 from us.

As a father has compassion on his children,
 so the **LORD** has compassion on those who
 fear him.

READING II 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

It is written, *The **first man**, Adam, became a **living being**,
 the **last Adam** a **life-giving spirit**.*

But the **spiritual** was not **first**;
 rather the **natural** and then the **spiritual**.

The **first man** was from the **earth**, earthly;
 the **second man**, from **heaven**.

As was the **earthly one**, **so also** are the earthly,
 and as is the **heavenly one**, **so also** are the heavenly.

Just as **we** have borne the image of the **earthly one**,
we shall also bear the image of the **heavenly one**.

Corinthians = kohr-IN-thee-uhnz

The temptation here is to give the bulk of your emphasis to the comparison between "spiritual" and "natural." Instead, give the primary emphasis to the "first man" and the things of earth, along with the "second man" and the things of heaven.

Proclaim these last two lines slowly; Paul connects our life to his argument about the difference between the first man and the second man.

David's innocence and his noble character. Presented with the opportunity to defeat and kill Saul, David demonstrates that he is truly the Lord's anointed one. Even Saul, whose words are not present in this reading, admits his guilt and blesses David (1 Samuel 26:21, 25).

READING II Today we return to Paul's rhetorical argument in defense of the resurrection from the dead, which some in the Corinthian community were denying. In his earlier arguments (see the Fifth and Sixth Sundays of Ordinary

Time), Paul began by verifying Jesus' death and resurrection through an appeal to creedal statements and multiple witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). Then, using a series of logical statements, Paul sketched out the consequences of what would happen if Christ is not raised: no one has been raised. This would deny hope to the living and the dead (15:12-20). In 15:21-28, Paul compared Adam (the person through whom death came) to Christ (the person who makes all alive), establishing a typology to which he will return. Next, in addressing concerns about the nature of the resur-

rected body (15:35-43), Paul asserted that, like a kernel of grain, the human person is sown a natural/physical body (*sōma psychikon* in Greek) but raised a spiritual body (*sōma pneumatikon* in Greek) (15:44).

In order to apply the contrast between physical and spiritual to today's reading, Paul returns to the first Adam-second Adam typology by contrasting the first Adam, a living being (Genesis 2:7), with the second, ultimate Adam, a life-giving spirit. The scriptural distinction is followed by pairs of contrasting features: Adam received life, Christ gives life; Adam is natural/physical,

Jesus' teaching offers concrete advice for his disciples—then and now. He begins with general terms: "love," "do good," "bless," and "pray." Accentuate these powerful verbs of Christian living.

Here Jesus challenges his followers to a higher standard of action and emotion than their social context would generally require.

Resist the urge to focus strongly on the word "sinners." We are all sinners! The distinction is important, however, so a lingering over this word rather than an emphasis will illustrate the contrast.

GOSPEL Luke 6:27–38

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Jesus said to his disciples:

"To you who **hear** I say,

love your **enemies**, do **good** to those who **hate** you,
bless those who **curse** you, pray for those who **mistreat** you.

To the person who strikes you on **one** cheek,
offer the **other** one as well,
and from the person who takes your **cloak**,
do not withhold even your **tunic**.

Give to **everyone** who asks of you,
and from the one who **takes** what is **yours** do not demand
it **back**.

Do to **others** as you would have them **do** to **you**.

For if you **love** those who **love** you,
what **credit** is that to you?

Even **sinners** love those who love them.

And if you **do good** to those who **do good** to you,
what **credit** is **that** to you?

Even **sinners** do the same.

If you **lend money** to those from whom you expect **repayment**,
what **credit** is **that** to you?

Even **sinners** lend to sinners,
and get back the same amount.

But **rather**, **love** your **enemies** and do **good** to them,
and **lend** expecting **nothing** back;

then your **reward** will be **great**

and you will be **children** of the **Most High**,

for he **himself** is **kind** to the **ungrateful** and the **wicked**.

Be **merciful**, just as your **Father** is **merciful**.

Christ is spiritual; Adam is formed from the dust of the earth, Christ is from heaven.

Finally, Paul establishes a crucial distinction between the physical creation of Christians and their spiritual destiny. All born of dust like Adam are earthly and bear the image of the earthly one. But all who are baptized in Christ and receive his life-giving spirit also bear the image of the heavenly one. It is the spiritual body that will be raised to eternal life.

GOSPEL

As we saw in last week's Gospel reading, Luke's Sermon on the Plain shares similar content with Matthew's Sermon on the Mount but takes the content in strikingly different directions. In both traditions, Jesus addresses his disciples and a vast crowd. Both include beatitudes, but Luke streamlines them and balances them with woes. And as we see today, both continue with a challenging block of teaching. But where Matthew roots Jesus' teachings in the Mosaic law, Luke directs Jesus' teaching to his disciples and applies it to the challenges of daily life.

Today's Gospel passage consists of three components: responding in love to enemies and opponents, a transitional verse, and cautions against judging others. In the first segment, Jesus immediately identifies the governing factor in a disciple's action: love. This is not a sentimental love; rather, it is an exceedingly demanding ethical standard. Jesus' instruction on love relates directly to the beatitudes/woes—"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name" (Luke 6:22). Based on today's reading, he could have added,

The parallel grammatical structure is important, but not as important as the word "you" in this brief section. Emphasize the first appearance of the word ("judging," "condemning," and so on) in each pair, followed by emphasizing the word "you."

"Stop **judging** and **you** will not be judged.
 Stop **condemning** and **you** will not be condemned.
Forgive and **you** will be forgiven.
Give, and gifts will be given to **you**;
 a **good** measure, **packed** together, **shaken** down,
 and **overflowing**,
 will be **poured** into your **lap**.
 For the measure with which you measure
 will in **return** be measured out to you."

"And blessed are they for you are to love them!" The enemies whom followers of Jesus are to love are not hypothetical opponents, but rather, they are the opponents of everyday life who hate, exclude, insult, denounce, and make demands. In response, the love that followers of Jesus show goes beyond the Golden Rule or the law of retaliation. This is so for two reasons. First, they are to exceed an equalizing ethic that is acceptable even to sinners. Second, their love must reflect what God, who is "kind to the ungrateful and the wicked," would do.

The transition sentence, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," ties the first part to the last part. Moving from the love of the enemy and opponent in the first section, through God's mercy in the transition, we come to Jesus' teaching regarding judgment. Faith-filled disciples are not to judge or condemn. They are to forgive and give. These dispositions are recommended not to avoid the judgment or condemnation of others, but rather to identify the measure by which God will respond to them. The measure they use in judging and condemn-

ing others, God will use on them. The measure they use to forgive and give, God will use on them. In other words, the disciple's best self reflects God's merciful love. S.L.