

SERMON KRIJTBERG SATURDAY, 13th MARCH 2021
on 2 Chronicles 36, 14 – 16 + 19 – 23. and John 3, 14 – 21.
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During Lent, my dear friends, in our weekend liturgy the church offers us some of the great biblical stories from the Old and New Testament. These are often stories that to us, people of the 21st century, sound rather strange, so that we find it hard to see their relevance to us in our lives. They need quite a bit of explaining. For instance the first reading of this evenings Mass from the book of Chronicles. So bear with me when I try to make this reading somewhat more understandable.

The fundamental experience of the Jewish people, the great story of its origin, is the Exodus story. God liberates his chosen people, under the leadership of Mozes, from their fate as slaves in Egypt. It is the story of God's mighty deeds against Pharaoh and during their journey of forty years through the desert. During this journey God makes a covenant with his people: "If you live according to this covenant you will be my people. You will live a good life in the land the Lord your God will give you, and He will be your God. If, on the other hand, you break this covenant and live according to your own ideas and preferences, then you will get into trouble and I will not be there to rescue you."

The book of Chronicles relates the history of the people after they had settled down in the promised land. It recounts the deeds of their kings. Some of them reigned according to the covenant of the Lord. In those years the land flourished and the people lived in peace. But when the king and the leaders of the people did what God had forbidden, then everything went wrong. They got caught up in wars. The country would be plundered and cities destroyed, and the tide would not be reversed until they regretted their infidelity and returned to the Lord and his covenant.

The content of the covenant between God and his people is what we now call the Ten Commandments. The first three are about our relationship with God and the other seven about the relationships among ourselves. Although we no longer experience these guidelines for a good life as a covenant between God and his people, we do still try to live according to these commandments.

Today's reading from the book of Chronicles told the story of the final disaster that overcame the Jewish people. The king and the leaders did what was wrong in the eyes of God. They venerated other gods and everyone was seeking his or her own profit, neglecting the poor and forgetting the common good. God often send his messengers, the prophets, to warn them about the consequences of their behavior, but the people would not listen. They would not return to the Lord's covenant, and when the Babylonian King invaded the country they were unprepared for what happened. The enemy conquered Jerusalem, burnt the temple, destroyed the city and those who escaped the sword were carried captive to Babylon, where they once again were made slaves of their victors.

What is the relevance of this story today? I think that most people will agree that we live in challenging times. Thank God it looks as though we have got the worst of the Corona pandemic behind us. But far greater problems are looming ahead. The threat of climate

change is not going away and there will be no vaccine against its consequences. We have already suffered greatly from the measures imposed on us in our fight against the virus. But the measures needed to prevent a global climate disaster will prove to be at least as limiting and will probably not be for just a few months. I do not know what we have to expect, but I do know that we are well advised to remember the way of life that God has outlined for us in the Ten Commandments. That is a way of life, grounded in God and based on respect and care for one another. A way of life that is the opposite to the egoistically inspired consumerism that we see all around and that most of us happily partake in. We have to realise that the common tendency to expect more, more, more of everything is simply unsustainable. And if we do not limit ourselves drastically and voluntarily, the limitations will soon be once more imposed on us unvoluntarily. There is very little time to prevent the worst case scenario.

This week we all have the wonderful possibility to vote for our next government. That is a real privilege in our free part of the world. I think we have a huge responsibility in choosing who we trust with our vote. Do I vote for 'more, more, more', or do I vote for responsibly less and for greater worldwide equality? Do I vote for someone who promises to keep our wealth for the privileged us, or do I vote for someone who will try to lessen the unspeakable tragedy of world poverty? We have been well informed about all that is at stake. God send us his messengers to warn us, the scientists of every nation and of every speciality. We know what lies ahead. Let us pray for the courage to do what is right, even when it costs us dearly.

In today's gospel Jesus is interviewed by one of the leaders of the people in Jerusalem. Nicodemus was his name. He honestly wants to find out who Jesus is. What does he have to say about himself? He wants to find out whether he will vote for or against Jesus. And Jesus is very frank and outspoken. What Jesus asks of Nicodemus is a complete change of life. He goes so far as to say that he will have to be born again, become a new person, a person who lets himself be guided by God's Spirit instead of by the spirit of this world. Jesus invites him to open his eyes to the light that came into the world through Him. Jesus knows and says that it is only too clear that people prefer darkness to light. They want to do their own thing, want to profit and enjoy the privileges they have got used to. In the eyes of the people they want to shine as 'good-doers' and trustworthy guides. Their real motivations and manipulations have to stay in the dark as much as possible. They should not be exposed. Jesus invites Nicodemus, and over his shoulder invites all of us, to come out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.

These stories are old. But they are as relevant today as they were in biblical times. We are being challenged by Jesus to discern our motives, our actions. Of course we all say that we prefer God's light to the darkness of this world.

This week we have the chance to prove it. Let us pray that we may find the strength to act accordingly, Amen.