

12th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR C

School was over for the day, and the thirteen year old boy got on the bus to go home. He phoned his mother to let her know he was on his way. Then he phoned his father and they chatted. Suddenly the phone went dead. The father did not know why, but he was to learn very soon. His son was dead.

It was March 5th, 2003, at precisely 2.14p.m. and 32 seconds, according to the boys' wristwatch when the suicide bomber struck. In all, seventeen people died on that bus, Israelis and Arabs. It happened in Haifa, on a street called Moriah Avenue. Moriah was the place in Old Testament times where God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, and then spared him. But these people were not spared.

The boy who died was called Yuval Mendeleovich. His father is Yosi. In sorrow for his lost boy, Yosi has created a memorial website on the internet, to tell people about his lovely boy, to share his sorrow with the world and to show the beauty of life and the sheer banality and pointlessness of hatred. In the story of his own son the words of Zechariah have come true. "They will look on the one whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as for an only son, and weep for him as people weep for a first-born child." In Yuval's room there is a poster. It says, "A whole generation wants peace." Now Yuval is dead, and the world still does not have peace.

When Jesus was teaching his disciples his good news, the most difficult lesson he had to teach them was about the mystery of suffering. Their optimism in following Jesus was buoyed up by his prowess as a preacher and a healer, and by his acceptance among the general public. People liked him and were very impressed by him and things were looking good. It could only get better.

Gently and gradually Jesus attempts to make them aware that this world is very resistant to goodness. He needs to show them that the spread of goodness over the world comes at a price. You cannot win the world over to peacefulness with just a smile. You have to engage with the evil in some people's hearts. You have to deal with the history of pain and the inheritance of vengeful thoughts and deeds. This life is not a walk in the park.

Such a message is not easy to entertain or comprehend. The disciples were very slow to grasp what Jesus was saying. So are we. The Son of Man is going to suffer and be crucified. If you wish to follow that Son of Man then you, too, must take up a cross every day. You, too, must embrace your share of the world's pain. How are we going to do this?

Perhaps we can find our answer in the words of that Old Testament prophet, Zechariah. Our Christian faith is based on a crucified Christ. We are asked to "look on the one whom they have pierced." Our prayer, our meditation takes place before the crucified. Be still before Jesus on the cross and listen. There you will learn lessons of humility, patience and trust in God.

Standing at the foot of the cross, we are all sisters and brothers to each other. There are no more distinctions between people to keep us apart. Jew, Gentile, Arab, Greek, male, female, slave, free – these distinctions must not be allowed to matter. In Jesus Christ we are all the children of Abraham. That is how we will live.

On the last morning of his life, that young boy, Yuval, had said to his father, "Give me some strength for the day." And his father hugged him.