

## Two Worlds

The other week, I read an interesting account of two world views colliding. One was the Old Testament Babylonian Empire, the all-conquering nation, who had taken the Israelites into exile. This Empire, the author suggested, was forged in the likeness of its creation narrative, a narrative that involved God's and Demi-Gods who fought wars among themselves, it was a creation story of murder, double-crossing and conquest.

Israel, an exiled people found themselves disorientated and dislocated in this strange land. Their narrative comes from the God of Creation that we know well, with the ongoing relationship of a people that had been liberated from Egypt. Here in Babylon, nothing resonated with the Israelite creation narrative, founded on justice and caring for the land, with laws about caring for the widow and stranger, of giving back land to the disposed, of leaving the edges of the fields unharvested of allowing animals to rest. Their world view was at odds with the one they now lived in, no wonder they complained, 'How can we sing the Lords song in a strange land. (Psalm 137.4)

Two worlds are at the centre of our Gospel today. We read that Jesus had taken the disciples to one side and explained what is to happen, the 'Son of Man will be handed over... and on the third day he will be raised'. In the gospel this comes right after the parable of the labours in the vineyard, where a new, radical world view of the first will be last and the last will be first is explained. A view that sits at odds with the world of first century Judaism, living in a land ruled by Rome, where the last will always be last.

Jesus having declared the path he is to travel is approached by the mother of two of the disciples, she comes forward to ask a favour. Is she an overzealous parent seeking, as I have seen on occasions, (and perhaps I was one myself) seeking favour so that my children would not be overlooked? I probably wore that mantel when mine were younger, but not in their adult years. My eldest will testify to that as he came to Sandhurst Academy when I was a Chaplain there, I was perhaps harder on him than the other cadets so that he 'succeeded or not' on his own merit and not mine.

A mother on her knees seeks a favour. Jesus response is interesting, (we find a slightly longer version later in the same chapter to the blind men) he asks, 'What do you want?' What she wants is a declaration that will place her sons above the others in the pecking order of power. She sees Jesus as the liberator of the Jewish people from the occupation of the Romans, he was the power that was to save, and she wanted her boys up at the top, riding high at his side. But he responds, can they drink the cup that is coming his way? In the Old Testament, "cup" can refer to blessings, but also judgment, or death, it was also a common metaphor for suffering, especially at God's hands, and Jesus is very clear that decisions are God's and not his, he does his Fathers will.

As said, this is not the only favour asked for in this chapter. Later two blind men cry out to Jesus for a favour, cry out for mercy, and we hear again that question, 'What do you want me to do for you? In stark contrast the blind men seek to have their 'eyes opened.' The opening of eyes releases them from physical blindness and liberates them to follow Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem. They may have been physically blind but clearly, they were 'Spiritually sighted', unlike the mother of our two disciples.

These two men had lived in the disorienting world of darkness, for them the light they found through Jesus placed them within the world view of scripture, '...I will keep you and appoint you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind... (Isaiah 42.6-7) The mother who sought preferment for her sons could only relate to the world she found around her, one forged like the Babylonians through war and occupation, a world forged by the power of the strong standing on the backs of the weak. If she had opened her spiritual eyes and listened to the words of Jesus, she would have understood that it was a new world (well old world) built on the narrative of justice and caring that Jesus was ushering in, but it would and could only come through sacrifice, and the first sacrifice was to be his.

Her blindness and the disciple's foolishness in saying they could take the same cup, led Jesus to be a little more explicit about the two worlds. The world of power and subjugation they knew well, look at the Gentiles, and I would suggest it is one that we know even today. And while we cannot escape this world and we have to engage in it, we can do so with our feet firmly in the world that stretches back to our creation narrative, of justice and caring, a world of service and servanthood, a world that reflects Gods generous and gracious love. Love given in the outstretched arms of Jesus on a Cross and heard in words of encounter on Easter Day.

Philip