

# Hard Things In The Midst Of Plenty

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our God and Father, we gather in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. We have accepted his invitation to come and do this in remembrance of him, remembering his death and passion, remembering his resurrection, remembering the blood of the covenant under which we have all come.

We ask that we may be given as your people with the work of bearing witness to you, an understanding of your purpose in our midst, a fresh and new understanding as we turn again to your word.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. The passage that we're looking at, read as the Old Testament lesson this morning, is 2 Kings chapter 23, verses 1 to 7.

And it's described as an oracle, I suppose because that's what it is. And we associate oracles mostly with something that comes out of some hidden shrine, while this, in fact, is an oracle which comes from the lips of King David, from whom we've heard a great deal through the whole of our lives.

But this is recorded as being of particular significance, because as chapter 23 and verse 1 says, that, I'm not at chapter 23 and verse 1, which is the cause for a slight delay.

[ 1 : 55 ] What it says at 1 Kings, or 2 Samuel 23, these are the last words of David. Well, I must say that I am not pleased with God this morning, and find it awkward that I have to stand up and proclaim this gospel.

I really am mystified by the United Church, who with great courage is in a catch-22 situation. Ordination is not primarily a matter of right, as far as I can tell.

And to claim it as a matter of right rather confuses the issue. Homosexuals, I'm sure, have been ordained for centuries. What's the peculiarity about our situation?

Well, the peculiarity has to do with a lot of things that are part of our contemporary world, that the United Church is trying to grasp, trying to grapple with, trying to answer.

And it's not easy. It's not easy. And I think that one of the problems that we often have is that the Christian Church is reputed to have enlightened reason.

[ 3 : 18 ] Most people exercise reason, but the Christian Church has enlightened reason. I don't think it has at all.

I think the Christian Church has the Word of God, period, full stop, and we're locked into it. We have to wrestle with it, we have to fight with it, we have to argue with it, we have to challenge it, allow it to challenge us, and we're caught in that situation.

And we don't bring enlightened reason to any of the great issues in our world. We only bring to our world the Word of God. That's what we are prisoners to.

That's all we have to contribute as a community. Some of you may have a great deal to contribute as medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, humanitarians, political scientists.

You may have a lot to say, but the unique contribution of us as a community is that we have to labor within the confines of the Scriptures to speak to our generation.

[ 4 : 26 ] And I think that it's very difficult to do that. I don't know how we confront the shame and disgrace which many of us are blood relatives to in terms of the hatred in Northern Ireland that persists and persists and persists year after year, decade after decade.

It goes on. A seething cauldron of hatred that nothing seems to be able to change. And the killing goes on and on and on.

Why does that happen? Why is there no solution? Why is there no solution? And then I heard this morning that there are earthquakes in India and Nepal and hundreds and hundreds of people have died.

How do you answer that question? A question which comes immediately to our minds and hearts. Are we just the victims of caprice? That we don't know what's happening in our world and we know that this kind of human tragedy the flooding in the drought-stricken Sudan so that that country which has been suffering from drought for so long is now swamped with poisoned water that nobody can drink.

And the native people and their right to fish out in Port Alberni. What does that mean? How do we as a nation recognize the rights of all the citizens of this nation or in perhaps the right not to be citizens of this nation and yet to occupy this land?

[ 6 : 12 ] How do we deal with that? I don't think there are easy answers for that. And the thing that compounds the problem for me and I'm sure for all of you is that we are called to live in the lap of luxury in the idyllic circumstances of Vancouver on this west coast.

And we're not particularly a loving, satisfying people. We seem to be grasping. We seem to be as greedy as anybody else.

We seem to have a sense of peculiar deserving. There's nothing that qualifies us particularly to deserve the benefits that God has given us.

People understand each other better under the stress of war or famine. But we don't understand each other in the midst of plenty which has just been heaped on us.

And so that we we long to know some kind of reality. Why does God do this? Why can we sit here in the luxury of our west coast homes and watch the daily panorama of hunger and earthquake and violence throughout our world and feel so powerless before it all?

[ 7 : 45 ] Well, I want you to look at 2 Samuel chapter 23. I want you to derive some comfort from it. I want you to have some awareness of how it is the word of God for us on this day.

It's the word of God to which we open our hearts and minds to which we expose all the secrets of our own reality the pain and the frustration and the anger.

and the satisfaction and the selfishness. Those aren't necessarily meant to go together but there's something about our life which is peculiarly aggravating that we have such loveliness around us all the time and yet we're not a more compassionate and loving people.

our capacity seems to grow with the provision for us. I mean our greed and pride seems to grow and grow as fast as that provision is made.

Well, let's look at a person and that person is an old man at the end of his life and he speaks. Now, in one man God has chosen to show you who you are.

[ 9 : 11 ] If you want to know who you are figure out who David is and then you will understand yourself a whole lot better. In a sense David has been put under the microscope of God and every detail of his life has been made known to us and in looking at his life we see something of our own.

Now, this old man speaks this oracle at the end of his life. It's funny that God reveals to us who we are through one other person. We look at that one other person.

God shows us who we are as a nation through one other nation and that other nation is Israel. The ancient Israel of the scriptures is the nation through which God shows us who we are.

God, I think, reveals to us what we believe and what our faith is in by showing us the person of Jesus Christ. And I don't care which of the world religions you belong to or those whom you meet belong to.

Jesus Christ is a person of world stature and needs to be made known to our world.

[ 10 : 31 ] And so we look at this word which is spoken to us by this man and look at him. This is David the son of Jesse, his lowly beginning.

David who was raised on high to the highest office, the great American dream from the log cabin to the presidency, from a shepherd boy to the king of Israel.

It's an old pattern in our history. This is the one who was the anointed of God. That is, his life was given to him but within that life there was a purpose given to him for which he was anointed and that anointing he carried through his life and you as the people of God are anointed people.

God has a purpose for you except just the endurance of the days which are yours. He has that purpose for us as he had for David.

not only that but he was also the musician. He went around with a guitar or what corresponded to that for him a stringed instrument and he played and he taught people to sing and we need to learn to sing in a way that we don't.

[11:56] I mean singing has to come right out of our hearts. Music has to probe deeply into our lives and get hold of who we are and what we feel and how we think and where we're going.

It has to give expression to that and God gave to this man the unique ability to do that so that when he played his instrument he could soothe the taut nerves of the violence of King Saul.

He came as a musician and you know what it says about him? He was a person by whom God spoke.

Look at it. It's right there. It's a startling change of prepositions. Chapter 23 verse 2 The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me.

Verse 3 The Rock of Israel has spoken to me. So he's not only one through whom God spoke he's one to whom God spoke and he had the ability to hear and respond to what God was saying.

[13:10] No matter what lack of virtue or immorality may smear the character of your life the thing that is most important for all of us is that we might be those to whom God speaks and our hearts might be open to let him speak to us.

It's very important that that should happen as God spoke to David and he also spoke through David and how well we know that.

People come here over and over again with the grief of bereavement heavy on their hearts and they don't know what to say and suddenly they are released when they turn to the words of David and he has articulated for them what they could never put into words and they are able to say the Lord is my shepherd he leadeth me by the still waters yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I know your presence David spoke God spoke through David and gave us the very words by which we speak to God and through and God speaks through us it was David who taught us to articulate that longing when we say under the hills around do I lift up my longing eyes oh whence for me shall my salvation come from whence arise from God the Lord doth come my certain aid from God the Lord whom heaven and earth hath made this is the one through whom

God spoke and by whom God spoke and by whom we speak to God and God speaks through us Lord thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another before ever the earth the world was made thou art God from everlasting to everlasting and as we came into church this morning all people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord that that wonderful fact that David is the one through whom God spoke so that we can speak we become a people maybe locked into our situation but we are able to articulate some of the deepest longings of the whole of mankind in the words taught us by this man through whom

God spoke by his spirit and then it says that he mirrored what it was to be a king under God lovely lovely picture in verse four when one rules justly over men ruling in the fear of God what happens he dawns on them like the morning light like the sun shining forth upon a cloudless morning like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth it bursts out it's you know the quiet loveliness of dawn when it is rained through the night and the garden is bedewed with the rain and glistens like a million sparkling diamonds well now that is the picture of how God blesses a people through the rule of one who fears God and rules just that's the pattern by which we are to live that's the rule that is to come to all the violent and dark places of our world that fearing of God and ruling just when David sees the perfection of God's purpose he also sees what we all see and what I complain to you about time and time again even as I have this morning

[17:38] Lord if that's what is your purpose if it is as on a day like this when the sun dawns and brings loveliness and light to all that's around us when you do that to us why are the circumstances of my life such absolute chaos that's what is thought to be in the mind of David as he says this thing in verse five yea does not my house stand so with God in spite of all the evidence to the contrary in spite of the violence in spite of the killing in spite of the rape in spite of the greed in spite of the struggle for power that is going on in my own family God you are still in control are you not that's the question David asks in verse five does not my house stand so with God even though

I am surrounded by these circumstances which would break the heart of an old man full of years and ready to go the way of his father still God I have this faith and he describes what this faith is he says he has made with me an everlasting covenant the circumstances of this present moment do not weigh in the balance anything God has established with me an everlasting covenant and when time has run out that covenant will stand when my life is over that covenant will stand where the tortuous root of history has been fulfilled that covenant will stand that's the faith that

David talks about in verse five will he not cause to prosper all my help and all my desire God has put in my heart that longing God has put into my heart that desire won't he fulfill it and that you see I

think is what is most important for us maybe I've got too many most important things to throw at you today but can you see that in the midst of all our circumstances God's covenant ratified by the death of Jesus Christ that what has happened in that covenant is that God has committed himself to us that's the great fact that's the eternal reality that's the basis of the covenant this unconditional commitment that God has made to us and which is in a sense placarded before us in this service of holy communion and we come and we receive the signs of that covenant the body and blood of Christ and we receive that and we by that enter into the covenant we are the bit players in the covenant the profundity of it is the commitment that

God has made to us and that we trust him no matter what the circumstances are we put our whole faith and trust in him you see it's when a man comes to die somebody comes and says to him have you drawn up your will you probably have a wheelbarrow load of junk to dispense on your heirs well I don't know whether David was ever asked that question or not him but when he comes to the end of his life he says God has drawn up his will and his purpose will be the inheritance of my family of those whom I love and care for his will is an eternal covenant in which he has committed himself to us and that's the heritage

I leave well then the passage ends passage ends with that lovely long stick of black very king vicious stuff that it is but look at how David picks that up as Sarah did and uses it godless men are like thorns that are thrown away they cannot be taken with the hand the man who touches them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear and they are utterly consumed with fire they tear they cause to bleed they rip they grow where gardening stops they're in most gardens in this parish according to the children and there they are and they're there because in a sense when you leave land alone it doesn't grow flowers it grows thorns and thistles that tear and cut and there is right in the center of human existence the reality of evil of ungodliness it's right there and you can be as optimistic as you like but it's still there when

[ 23 : 55 ] God when David says there is an eternal covenant yes but he says there's also one other reality from which you can't escape for the moment at least and that is the godless the worthless the mystery of iniquity men who as Jesus said in the gospel this morning there are some here who do not believe who have not got this faith who don't trust in God and you can't go and take them by the hand when you're with your bare hands you can't by yourself deal with evil you've got to arm yourself you've got to put gloves on your hands and the spear in order to go at them and they will seek to destroy you and you will have to be able to protect yourself against them but finally he says they are utterly consumed with fire well that's part of our world and that's how how this last word of David

I think is meant to comfort and assure us the nature of the God who spoke through him and to him the God who reigned in him the God whom he feared and by whom he reigned justly the faith he had in the midst of all his failure personally of the reality of the eternal covenant of God and the continuing reality of the godless who defy the purposes of God and we're called together as a community to live under that word of God and to exercise that faith in the circumstances of our world in order that God may reveal to his world through us his purpose of love towards us in Jesus Christ it is a hard world we're called I think to hard things when David summarizes his life he brings us face to face with this how are we going to work it out in our lives that's our business that's the essential business of our lives

God grant that we may turn our hearts and minds to that business and accomplish it not in our own strength but in the strength of him who has called us even Jesus Christ our Lord amen and to their rest in the them and what