

Sunday 19th August 2012 Holy Cross Mdantsane, 9 a.m.		20th Sunday of the Year B Theological Education Sunday Induction of AWF leadership Month of Compassion
2 Sam 18:24-33	Ps 102:1-12	Ephesians 5:15-20
		John 6:51-58
The mercy and grace of God		

“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I in them.” (Jn 6:56)

Greetings to Archdeacon Thami, and Jonathan; to the assistant clergy and their families; to churchwardens, parish councillors, lay ministers; to our guild leadership – and especially to our newly-inducted AWF membership. We congratulate you and thank you. It is particularly good to welcome Kokela Siqendu, the AWF Diocesan President, here amongst us this morning.

A particular greeting, in Women’s Month, to the leaders and members of St Agnes Guild. The Archdeaconry of Grahamstown had the privilege of hosting the AGG for their diocesan conference. What a wonderful event. Well done and congratulations to their leadership.

Thank you to our rector and Archdeacon, the Ven Thami Mhlana, for her work, ministry, prayer, love, faithfulness. It is a privilege to serve on Cathedral Chapter with her; we as a diocese are blessed by her ministry, her faith and her wisdom. Thami, thank you.

Thank you also to our assistant clergy, for your ministry here. Particular congratulations to Revd Themba Skweyiya on your recent ordination to the diaconate.

King David weeps at the death of Absalom

Our scripture readings take us into the heart of our broken, hurting world; they encourage us to give thanks at all times and for

everything; they remind us to be filled with the Holy Spirit; they point us to Jesus who is the bread of life.

The story of King David is a story of victory and triumph, a great king, an inspiring leader, someone who as a young man learned to trust in God – an example and encouragement for all our young people.

It is also the story of someone whose public life was a success, but whose private life was a disaster. David was blessed by God in his role as king, but he betrayed the trust that others had placed in him. He became an adulterer with Bathsheba; he had Bathsheba's husband Uriah killed; David's son Amnon raped David's daughter Tamar; partly as a result of that, David's son Absalom rebelled against him, and was finally captured and killed.

Our reading picks up the story after the death of Absalom. We see David and those with him waiting anxiously for news of the battle. In those days before cell-phones, or radio, the only way to carry a message quickly was to send it with a runner. The messenger arrives. The news, we would think, is good. David's army has won the battle. The rebel Absalom is dead. The country can be at peace once again. David can continue to rule as king.

But his response? "The king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he wept, he said, 'O my son, Absalom, my son... Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (2 Sam 18:33)

Why did he grieve? Perhaps he was grieving for all that he had lost; for the many times he had failed his family, his children, the people he ruled, the God he served and loved. He grieved as he looked back over all that was broken.

God's mercy and grace in our weakness

Why do we read these sad stories from the Old Testament? Because they are also our stories. There are times when we as parents weep over our children, when we as a community, as a nation weep over what is happening.

We weep as we hear of the Marikana mine massacre, and related deaths, this past week. Archbishop Thabo Makgoba has called for “strong, but measured and proportionate intervention” from Government, police and trade unions to end the “senseless loss of life.” We need leaders who are able to lead their people, all of us, away from confrontation and rage and violence, to find peace, and a way forward. What happened at Marikana on Thursday was a failure of leadership, on the part of the police, the trade unions, the mine owners. Our hearts go out to all who have lost loved ones, and those who are injured.

We weep as we look at the crisis in education, especially here in the Eastern Cape. The current situation needs leaders who can look beyond their own interests, to the interests and well-being of everyone. We are facing a failure of leadership – the department, the teachers’ trade unions, the school governing bodies – and it is our children who are paying the price.

And what about our own lives? Like David, many of us have known the call of God, the hand of God on our lives. I am sure that we have some young King Davids here in our midst: future leaders, young men and women of immense promise and potential; young people with energy and courage and deep faith in God. And we probably have some old King Davids here as well. We learned to trust in the Lord from childhood. We can look back and remember the times that God delivered us, the times that God used us to do great things. But we also look back with sadness, at the times we failed God, the times we betrayed the trust that others put in us; the times, like David, when we have faced the consequences of our terrible mistakes; times when we have caused immense hurt, times when we look back on our actions

with shame, times when people look at us with sadness and disappointment – and we weep.

But like King David, as we weep, we face with honesty what we have done and the damage we have caused; like David, we come to that place of deep heartfelt repentance and a fresh experience of God's grace and forgiveness.

David made the mistake of thinking that his private life was nobody's business; that what happened in his household was for his eyes only; that his family life would not touch the kingdom. Let us not think that we can conduct ourselves in one way in public, as Christians, but in private our lives do not give glory to God. Husbands and wives, parents and children, youth: how we behave towards one another on the streets, at school, or behind the closed doors of our homes, is part of our Christian witness. There is no place for violence, or abuse, or unfaithfulness.

But the good news is that there is place for repentance, and a new start, God's mercy and grace that heals and restores and makes new. The death of Absalom was a terrible lesson for David. But it also was a new beginning, a chance to rebuild the kingdom of Israel, to rebuild relationships that had broken, to walk with God once again.

God's mercy and grace

To do this we need the mercy and grace of God. "Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, for the days are evil. Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit... giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything..." (Eph 5:15-20). Be careful... make the most of the time... understand what the will of the Lord is... be filled with the Spirit...give thanks for everything.

Let us draw our strength from Jesus who is our food for the road, Jesus who is the living bread (Jn 6:51). Jesus is the one who gives us life. At the Eucharist, in receiving the bread and the wine, we share in the life of Jesus. We receive his body and his blood. We feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

Let us be a community filled with the Spirit – the Spirit which brings life and freedom. Today is Theological Education Sunday, when we pray for all who are involved in theological education, especially those at the College of the Transfiguration Grahamstown – Sinje Dlokweni and others - and those who are doing part-time study. We want well-trained clergy for the future life of our church. Next weekend is Diocesan Family Day. Let's come with our love gifts. August is the Month of Compassion – let's show care for those in need.

A final word to the parish leadership: I encourage you all, ordained and lay, to work together, to pray for one another, to love one another. Have clear portfolios. Do the duties you have been given. Carry out your responsibilities. Congratulations on your fund-raising gala dinner, when you were able to pay off your 2011 assessment, and give honour to people who have made a difference. Let's remember that what we give, we give to the mission of the church.

CONCLUSION

May the Lord bless and strengthen you in your life as the people of God together.