

*For Sunday March 17, 2019*

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Psalm 27

Phillipians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

## **Young'uns chat.**

### **Message:**

From the office window I often see children heading home from school. As they skip along the footpath mostly amongst their walking school bus or a parent tagging along behind them it makes me wonder what happened to the good-ole-days. These poor children being escorted home, and that is besides the ones who get driven to and from school, and I guess in the light of Fridays horror nothing will change this satellite parenting.

Yet I wonder how in the world are they ever going to have any adventures with an adult tagging along behind them? I know that the world has changed some since I was a kid, but the adventures that we could have on the way home from school, well let's just say, what our mothers don't know can't hurt them.

The children walking down the street on Friday, were going straight home; something we rarely did. We wandered home from school, and it could take hours to get home.

Now I know that some of you may be fond of saying that, 'when we were kids, we had to walk for miles and miles and miles, and it was all uphill in all types of weather, rain hail and snow and that was on the North Shore.' Yeah, yeah, kids today, they just don't know how lucky they are. Or are they?

That dilly-dallying on my way home from school was some of the best fun I can remember. After a day spent at school there was nothing quite like the fun we could get up to on our way home. Raiding a few fruit trees, as if there was any at home, playing in the local reserve with hide and seek or bows and arrows, guns and swords, all out of branches and anything else that could be improvised.

No matter how our toys looked or useful they were, we made lots of noise and fired invisible bullets. We played cowboys and Indians all the way home from school each and every day. Some days the cowboys would win. But more often than not those of us who were lucky enough to play Indians, we would win. We traded our pistols and bows and arrows for machine guns and bazookas and we

began to fight world war two, all over again. One day we were Germans, the next day we were Brits and sometimes, when the fighting became really intense, we'd miraculously fly our planes over one another's territory and try to bomb one another into submission. Great big clods of dirt would be hurled through the air until Spitfires would show up to chase us bombers over the hills. Cowboys and Indians, Germans, Brits and sometimes yanks. No matter which tribe we pledged our allegiance to the game always ended when someone got hurt. As mother would say someone will cry!

Our childhood tribalism would end when we realized that we'd all be in trouble if one of us got hurt. So, unless the injured party had broken a bone, they'd have to suck it up and bare the pain so as not to get us all in trouble. It was one for all and all for one, when it came to avoiding trouble from our parents.

If only our adult tribal games could end before anyone gets seriously hurt. Perhaps we were able to unite so quickly back when we were children simply because we played both parts. One day we were cowboys, the next Indians, one day we were Germans, and the next day we were British, or even a yank or two.

When I read this morning's reading from the book of Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, my heart sank, because I'd like to give up this sort of tribal God and not just for Lent. To give up the idol we have made of God that depicts God as some super-person, up there in the sky, just waiting to judge, help or not help us. To give up the images of God that limit God to some sort of father-sky-god who sees to it that your life unfolds as it was always meant to unfold. And then we read this story from Genesis in which Abram the one who would become Abraham the father of nations, Hebrew, Muslim, Christian has a vision of God.

In Abraham's vision God is cast as none other than the big chief who enters into a covenant with Abraham's tribe.

To seal the bargain this tribal god demands that Abraham perform a tribal ritual that heads of tribes used in those days to seal deals. In his vision, Abraham's God demands that Abraham take a heifer, a goat, and a ram, each three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon and cut each of these animals in half and lay each half opposite the other, except for the birds, which were just strewn whole into the whole bloody mess.

Abraham is overcome by some sort of trance as a deep, terrifying, darkness envelopes him. When the sun sets, a

smoking brazier and a flaming torch appear and pass between the halves of the animal sacrifices. The flaming torch is meant to symbolize Abraham's notion of who God is. This God of Abraham then goes on to predict that Abraham's tribe will be enslaved by their enemies, but not to worry because this God of Abraham's will punish the nation that enslaves them and in time Abraham's descendants will become a great nation capable of smiting other nations because God will be on their side.

This story of primitive tribalism lies at the very heart of our religious narrative. Our god is bigger and stronger than other gods so, not only will our god defeat your god, our tribe will prosper while your tribe will suffer defeat.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is said to have bemoaned the tribalism of his own day. While Herod looms large as a threat to Jesus and all that Jesus stands for, Jesus cries: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I wanted to gather your children together as a mother hen collects her babies under her wings—yet you refuse me.!"

Jesus reveals a new image of God; an image that rejects the tribal image of Abraham, and points to God as one who is like a mother hen caring for her young.

In a few weeks we will re-enact the tribal execution of Jesus who came preaching a new way of understanding who and what God is. Jesus tried to move us beyond our childish notions of the Divine. But he was nailed to a cross for threatening the status quo of tribalism which relies on the image of a tribal deity to uphold the system of oppression that leaves the powerful upon their thrones and keeps the poor and powerless oppressed and imprisoned. For as long as we are peering into the heavens searching for clues to the whereabouts of our Creator, we will fail to see the evidence that is all around us of the ONE who is was and ever more shall be MYSTERY. Jesus offered us another image of our Creator. And as we journey further into Lent, we will explore the image of God that Jesus proclaimed.

Next week I want to remind you that our image of God pales in comparison to the reality of God.