

2 Samuel 18:5 - 9, 15, 31 - 33  
Psalm 130  
Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2  
John 6:35, 41 - 51

### Living from another imagination

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In a lecture given recently in Melbourne William Cavanaugh drew attention to Lawrence Thornton's novel, *Imagining Argentina*. Carlos Reuda, the central character, is director of a children's theatre during the military regime in Argentina. Carlos' wife and daughter are taken away (disappeared) by the military dictatorship and in the course of a fruitless search for his loved ones; he is visited with a miraculous gift. He finds himself telling a boy whose father had been disappeared and tortured that he will be returned, and it happened. Further examples occur, and Carlos is sought out by many who seek news of their loved ones. Carlos' gift is not just that of seeing. The stories from his imagination actually alter reality. Carlos' friends are sceptical. They see a division between fantasy and reality, and to them it seems impossible to confront tanks and helicopters with imagination and stories. Carlos, on the other hand, rightly grasps that the contrast is not between imagination and the real, but between two types of imagination. Carlos tells a friend "there are two Argentinas, the regime's travesty of it, and the one we have in our hearts... We have to believe in the power of imagination, because it is all we have, and ours is stronger than theirs."

Cavanaugh, who now teaches in the United States, worked in the poor areas of Santiago, Chile, under the Pinochet regime. He wrote a book titled *Torture and Eucharist* in which he sets forth two forms of imagination: different ways of seeing and describing life that are each connected to two very different ways of acting and being in the world. Torture, and we would add Terrorism, is the extreme example of the imagination of the nation state which divides the world up between friends and enemies. Torture seeks to build national solidarity by creating the enemies we think we need, defining them as "other", a process which dehumanises them. Living in this imagination, which is the mind of the Generals, the leaders and all who live by fear, makes it possible to convince citizens to participate in acts of violence, torture and murder, and to travel across the world to destroy people they know nothing about.

Cavanaugh views the Eucharist as the drama that helps **undo** the imagination of Torture, Fear and Terror. It provides an alternative which enables participants to see the world differently. And it creates a social body, the Church, which cuts across all our traditional loyalties. To live in the Eucharist/Eucharistically is to live in God's imagination. It is to participate in the ritual enactment of God's redemptive power, grounded in the torture, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is a gift, which celebrates God's entry into darkness and death for us, who were his enemies. It re-enacts Jesus' overcoming the distinctions we make between enemy and friend - barriers so carefully cultivated. It reminds us that Christ made us God's friends when we worked so hard to remain enemies of God and one another. And it reminds us that in the Resurrection God has sided with the victims and defeated the powers of death wielded by those who Torture.

The graphic on the Order of Service reflects the controversy in the Gospel. Jesus, who has been teaching that he is the Bread of Life and that he has Heavenly origins, is confronted by people from his village who know him as the son of Joseph, and cannot integrate what he is saying with the facts. They live from an earthly imagination. The Spirit of God has not worked in their hearts. It is impossible for them to accept that the son of Joseph the Carpenter would have anything “other” - outside their imagination - to offer. It is a clash between the facts and a confession of faith. And it is precisely the type of clash of imagination that we have been thinking about. The Historical reality clashes with the Heavenly, and Jesus challenges his audience to see beyond his earthly origins to an alternative imagination received through faith.

The Bread of Life discourses in John’s Gospel are not overtly about the Eucharist, but they are clearly Eucharistic. There is a tension between what it means to live with an imagination focussed on ordinary bread - sustenance and money, compared with an imagination focussed on the Heavenly Bread, which satisfies human hunger and thirst at a much deeper level. This is the imagination based on faith, which has the power to change reality, because this imagination comes from a different source and direction from our own.

The Western world tends to think of history as linear. We are moving forward, and the past tends to be discarded and forgotten. But the memory that is evoked in the Eucharist operates differently. It is based on the first fruits of a new future that is coming to the world from God. When we “do this in remembrance of Jesus”, we do not leave the past behind, we look to the future, towards which we are journeying as pilgrims, when all our past will be gathered into God. In this way the central story of the Eucharist: the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is a dangerous memory. It has the power to disrupt what we know. It has the power to embody God’s response to torture and terror. It has the power to shift the focus away from the imagination of the powerful towards the memory and the hope that things don’t have to be as they are. What this means is that everything we do here signifies there is another imagination, which can dwell in our hearts and bring different results in the world. It is a force for good against all that seeks to oppress, demean and destroy life.

In *Imagining Argentina* Carlos tells his friend: “there are two Argentinas, the regime’s travesty of it, and the one we have in our hearts...” As we are daily confronted by news of a world in travail it is perfectly clear that a new imagination is needed if we are to find our way out of death into life.

We believe that Jesus embodied what God’s reign in the world looks like. He is the first fruits of God’s transforming new life amongst us. Jesus called people to him, taught them, and sent them out to offer the world an alternative to the one in which they were living. The aim of this activity was not merely the saving of souls, but the restoration of wholeness - the healing of creation. Jesus intended there to be communities who lived from this imagination, to bring justice, healing, growth and change. The calling of the church is to live, nurtured by this imagination so that it may engage, not in a holy war, but in a faithful living. This may be costly, and it may be a struggle. But it involves living to demonstrate this mode of life in all areas so that the essence, made clear in Christ, continues to work for the healing of Creation. In this way, what is given in scripture, and what we receive in the Eucharist, feeds us on our

pilgrimage and the life intended by our tradition, comes to light in our time through us, its living message bearers.

After Worship we will have a discussion about the Master Plan for the Curzon St Campus. Next week we will commence the Prism process of thinking about enhancing the worship space. Let us remember that our buildings are not meant to enslave us. They are a means of expressing our mission, places that embody the imagination centred on Jesus Christ. The physical realities we provide for ourselves are not just for ourselves. They are facilities shaped to be places which help us focus on our calling, and from which there is intended to shine forth, in word and deed, the justice, the healing, and the life that springs from the hope in which we live.