Old Testament

1 Kings 19:4-8

4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down
under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O
Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” 5 And he lay down and
slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise
and eat.” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot
stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel
of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for
the journey is too great for you.” 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the
strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

New Testament

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his
neighbour, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let
the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil. 28 Let the thief
no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his own hands, so
that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk
come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the
occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy
Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all
bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you,
along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one
another, as God in Christ forgave you.

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ
loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Sermon

Shaped by Grace

In the midst of the violence and hatred a British Muslim Chaplain, Adam Kelwick, decided to reach out to protesters. He and other members of his Muslim community stepped out with home-cooked food and crossed the police line, determined to speak to the people on the other side. Why…? Because they made the choice to deal with angry people in a way in which they hoped would open hearts and minds. An act that was done with the help of the police who indicated when it would be safe to do so, not until things had calmed down.

Adam told that he was invisible to the first group he approached. But continuing to be friendly and offering the food and drinks he finally broke through to somebody’s heart, who accepted the food and they started to talk.

A glimpse of hope.

Not everybody was receptive. Not everybody is receptive to love.

An act shaped by grace, can be risky.

You and I know that Grace is free but not cheap. The cost is visible in our Lord Jesus Christ, who chose to be vulnerable in the darkness of hostility, for our sake.

In our Old Testament reading we encounter a man who also knows all about vulnerability. Elijah. The prophet has had battles with king Ahab, who had abandoned the commandments of God. Battles with Ahab brought victories to Elijah who fought tirelessly with and for God. But now Elijah has come to the point where he has lost the will to live. Why…? Because driven by fury, Jezebel, Ahab's wife, is determined to take Elijah's life, while Israel bows with queen Jezebel before Baal.

That's it for Elijah.

The prophet who always tirelessly urged God's people to stay with God, as the prophet Moses did before him, Elijah is now tired himself. He is exhausted. He goes on a day's journey, puts himself under a tree and says

"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life…(1Kings 19:5)

and goes to sleep.

What does God do? Does He say: 'I understand Elijah, ok, I won't ask any more from you. You have been a good servant.' No, that is not God's response.

God does something. He sends food and water through an angel who touches Elijah and says

"Arise and eat",(1 Kings 19:5)

Elijah does arise, but only to eat and drink and then goes back to sleep.

However,

the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." 8 And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.(1 Kings 19:7-8)

God continues to go His way with Elijah. He addressed in His own mysterious way, Elijah's desire to die. Elijah's will to die was not God's will. The journey that God had in mind for His prophet had not come to an end, yet. God, being the Alpha and Omega, determines beginnings and ends. Instead of giving Elijah what he wanted, God gave Elijah what he needed to do God's will: new energy through His touch via the angel, and through food that gave him strength.

The heart of Elijah's story is its proclamation of God as Deliverer. From this delivering, saving God came Christ: He is our bread of life that gives us strength. In that light, it makes perfect sense, biblical sense, that God wanted the name of His Son to be Jesus/Yeshuah, for the meaning of that name is: 'God saves',

"an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. [21] She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, ***for he will save his people from their sins****."(Matthew 1:20-21)*

God saved out of love and continues to do so. But it involves engagement with His love. And that engagement is spelled out by the Apostle Paul, in our New Testament reading. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul raises and emphasises the issue of the congregation's crucial role, its crucial place in God's salvation plan.

Engagement with Him who sits on the heavenly throne implies a specific way of life. A life that is shaped by Grace; God's Grace through Jesus Christ. A life in which anger, which we all feel at times, is tamed, while it is easier to let it go its way: by letting it affect others, incite others and so letting it spread.

And that happens not only on the level we have seen on the news.

It happens in relationships on any level: between two people and more, within families, within church families. Extending anger through words does not build; is not constructive. God does not gain anything from it. Therefore, Paul's message to the Ephesian congregation and all congregations is this,

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another (Ephesians 4:25)

It is as if Paul's warning words from the book of Acts have become a reality

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30)

Falsehood and hearing twisted things do rightly trigger anger. At the same time, Paul urges,

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil (Ephesians 4:25)

For the devil is always alert and eager to take any opportunity to add to twists and lies, building the anger and so making people turn to him. Anger is a perfect chance for the devil to draw people to himself, away from God, by adding and magnifying twists and lies.

In the same way, from works from dishonest hearts, nothing is to be gained.

Paul then turns again to what so easily comes out of our mouths through a sharp tongue causing arguments. Anger, clamour and slander are to be put away with malice, as they are all forms of untamed anger. Their effects are destructive for the unity with Christ. Therefore, they have to be eliminated. Instead, kindness, tender-heartedness, forgiveness are to be the driving forces behind all actions. Driving

forces that are all rooted in the source: God Himself, through Jesus Christ, from Whom strength and wisdom come, to do good.

Following Christ means following the way of love, as Paul has it in 1 Corinthians 13:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

[4] Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[8] Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Amen