

David has Saul in his power; has the power to take his life – but does not use it. Mercy then as the willingness to abjure power – to be poor in the exercise of power in order to be rich in mercy; to continue the theme of last week’s exploration of the Beatitudes where poverty and richness are not as we might first see them. Today’s passage from Luke’s Sermon on the Plain makes this reversal of values clear – if one is rich one is to become poor in the sense that everything we have and are is not for our own sake only – it has a purpose for others. This does not preclude wisdom in its use – for this too is a gift to be exercised according to this dynamic of surrender, of acknowledging its origin in God. And there we have the clue to the possibility of it all and to Paul’s distinction between the first Adam constrained entirely by his natural self and the second Adam also natural but rich in Spirit. The difference being that Christ’s gift of himself to us enables us too to be rich in Spirit. So it’s all gift and our realisation of this realises the gift – makes it possible. One has to try it to see if it’s true, to make the change, that is, in oneself. For, of course, we have no power over our enemies in their reaction to our gift of love, to our powerlessness otherwise before them. They are as ‘free’ to reject this offer, this action, as we are ‘free’ to give it: that is, both constrained by human nature. It’s not a quid pro quo – a stratagem to win affection. No, it’s like faith – a risk taken to release a power not of our own making – we love and what happens next is not under our control, it’s the way of unconditional love and perhaps gives us an insight into God’s love for us – unconditional and willing to suffer the consequences of rejection, we are always free to turn away from God’s love, from this ever abundant source of our own power to love. David and Christ exercise it then at great risk to themselves: that is the nature of love – always in this sense sacrificial. We symbolise and gain access to this love in our eucharist, in our bringing ourselves to the altar as self-gift in order to be gifted by God. If we understood the full implication of this we might rather stay away for it robs us of the power to condemn others, to stand apart from them, to judge them as unworthy of God’s love – that is as unworthy of our own love. We might think we have not enough love to go round – family and friends are exhausting enough, but that’s to place a limitation on the nature of love, on the nature of God – love, like God, is unconstrained – how could it be otherwise for God is love?

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