

Year C

Psalm 67

The lectionary texts for this Sunday portray the cosmic reach of God's blessing. Paul sailed for Philippi where he shared the gospel and baptised Lydia, the first recorded European convert to Christianity. In the Revelation passage John was taken to the mountaintop where he saw the new Jerusalem and the nations moving through its gates to find healing from the tree of life. In Psalm 67 the Psalmist understood God's blessing of the believing community to

extend out into all the earth, to all the nations.

One of the greatest ambitions of any violinist is to play a Stradivarius. Meticulously handcrafted by Antonio Stradivari these very rare violins produce an unrivalled sound. So you can imagine the excitement of acclaimed British violinist Peter Cropper when, in 1981 London's Royal Academy of Music offered him a 258 year old Stradivarius for a series of concerts.

But then the unimaginable. As Peter entered the stage he tripped, landed on top of the violin and snapped the neck off. We can't

even begin to imagine how Peter Cropper felt at that moment. A priceless masterpiece destroyed!

Cropper was inconsolable. He took the violin to a master craftsman in the vain hope he might be able to repair it. And repair it he did. So perfect was the repair that the break was undetectable, and, more importantly, the sound was exquisite.

The Academy was most gracious and allowed him to continue using the Stradivarius. And so night after night, as Peter drew his bow across those string, Peter was reminded of the fact that what he once thought

irreparably damaged had been fully restored by the hand of a Master craftsman.

Psalm 67 describes the blessing of God in restoring his 'very good' creation. Harvest abundance is used as a metaphor for the blessing that is bestowed on the nations from the gathered believing community. That blessing will be exercised through reconciliation between the nations in the common praise of God and in new relationships of justice that come from the judgement of God.

Do you remember the well known verses in John's Gospel?

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

It's *the world* and not the individual that is the goal of God's work and it is God's justice that is honoured in *the world* through God's Son. The Psalm reminds us that we are living in the days of the harvest and that harvest is not confined to us, instead it can only be realised as the nations are led to praise the Lord.

The opening words of the Psalm are an adapted quotation from Numbers 6:24-26

which we are all familiar with at christening services. “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.” And those words are sung to the individual, most frequently, the little baby. But the words can only be sung to the baby because the words of blessing have all already gone out to the nations and are continually being extended to the nations on behalf of God by the believing community. We are blessed by God in order to bless others. It’s a straightforward principle but

one that we generally are very poor at practising.

An ambitious farmer, unhappy about the yield of his crops, heard of a highly recommended new seed corn. He bought some and produced a crop that was so abundant his astonished neighbours asked him to sell them a portion of the new seed. But the farmer, afraid that he would lose a profitable competitive advantage, refused.

The second year the new seed did not produce as good a crop, and when the third-year crop was still worse it dawned upon the farmer that his prize corn was being

pollinated by the inferior grade of corn from his neighbours' fields. His clutching destroyed the blessing.

In its January 25, 1988 issue, TIME provided an insight on selfishness and its corollary, sharing. Speaking about the introduction of the videocassette recorder, the article said, "The company had made a crucial mistake. While at first Sony kept its Beta technology mostly to itself, JVC, the Japanese inventor of the VHS (format), shared its secret with a raft of other firms. As a result, the market was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the VHS machines being produced."

This drastically undercut Sony's market share. The first year, Sony lost 40 percent of the market, and by 1987 it controlled only 10 percent. So then Sony jumped on the VHS bandwagon. While it still continued to make Beta-format VCRs Sony's switch to VHS, according to TIME, would likely send Beta machines to "the consumer-electronics graveyard."

Clutching destroys the blessing. So don't do it! We are to be active in the ministry of reconciliation among the nations not in a grand manner which is beyond the scope, the reach of our lives, but in small but

significant acts of blessing which make a difference.

I've referred to the story of Emil von Sauer before but it's worth repeating for today.

At the age of 16 Andor Foldes was already a skilled pianist, but he was experiencing a troubled year. In the midst of the young Hungarian's personal struggles, one of the most renowned pianists of the day came to Budapest. Emil von Sauer was famous not only for his abilities; he was also the last surviving pupil of the great Franz Liszt. Von Sauer requested that Foldes play for him.

Foldes obliged with some of the most difficult works of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann.

When he finished, von Sauer walked over to him and kissed him on the forehead. "My son," he said, "when I was your age I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, 'Take good care of this kiss--it comes from Beethoven, who gave it to me after hearing me play.' I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it."

We have a sacred heritage to pass on to others, to the world, to the glory of God.

Only in that way will the nations know the justice of God, not as a punishment for evil, but as a blessing through the giving of God's Son, Jesus. He is risen today and so the aspirational nature of Psalm 67 has found its reality in him. May God bless us as we bless others. Amen.

