

Would Jesus Tilt at Windmills?

^{NRS} **2 Samuel 1:1** After the death of Saul, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.

^{NRS} **2 Samuel 1:17** David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. ¹⁸ (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: ¹⁹ Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen! ²⁰ Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult. ²¹ You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor bounteous fields! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more. ²² From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor the sword of Saul return empty. ²³ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. ²⁴ O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with crimson, in luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. ²⁵ How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your high places. ²⁶ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. ²⁷ How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote: “There is always some madness in love. And there is always some reason in madness.” “There is always some madness in love. And there is always some reason in madness.” There’s a lot to chew on there.

I was thinking about this quote a lot in the last couple of weeks with the youth in Mexico- although more about the madness part, less about the reason bit. ☺

For instance I knew we were a little bit crazy when I met Bruce Silver, our fearless leader and associate pastor at Westminster in Medford- this towering bald man sporting a utili-kilt, combat boots, and bull horn he didn’t really need. As soon as you meet Bruce you realize in an instant you’re probably embarking on something that would make your grandmother a little bit nervous. As soon as you meet Bruce you know you’re part of something a little bit crazy.

And it wasn't Bruce- there were a cast of others. We took two ginormous buses from Medford down to Pasadena, along with one Budget truck and one minivan. I had the first shift driving the minivan and my job was to follow the Budget truck. Now the guy driving it had skin darkened by a life in the sun, long hair streaked with gray pulled up into a pony tail, and a gray t-shirt proclaiming to the world that he was "Property of Jesus". Now he turned out to be one of the foreman on my work site and I came to really like and admire him, but when we first met I was definitely thinking you don't follow people like this- you either pass them quickly or leave them a lot of room in front of you.

And then there was Brent, a youth from Medford, who showed up completely decked out in one of the best Mohawks I've ever seen. On the bus I asked him how he got to stand up so straight. "Wood glue," was his simple response. And there was the anonymous adult leader in my small group. The second day we were studying a text about a boy being healed of demons. This leader proceeded to completely floor my group at 8 in the morning telling us he liked this text because he had three demons when he was a kid- two he knew the name of, one he did not.

Oh, Nietzsche hit the nail on the head: "There is always some madness in love." And if this mission trip was one of love- it was certainly a little bit of madness, too.

Now it wasn't just the people who reminded me of this quote- it was the book I read on the trip as well. Now, you know, some people like to accessorize their clothes- match their shoes with their belt, wear jewelry that highlights something else they've got on. Some folks like to match their food with different kinds of wine. Well, in yet another acknowledgment that I probably need to get out more, I will admit to you that for

Mexico I decided to pair my destination with the reading material I brought along. I guess I figured if my clothes weren't going to match for 10 days, at least the books I was reading would match. So I brought along two Spanish language authors, poetry by Pablo Neruda, and *Don Quixote* by Miguel Cervantes.

Now most of you even if you haven't read *Don Quixote*, most of you know something of the story. You've either heard something about it or saw the musical *Man a la Mancha*. Well it's the story of a man who goes mad reading stories about knights in shining armor, names himself Don Quixote, and persuades his poor neighbor, Sancho Panza, to be his squire as they travel around the countryside getting into one misadventure after another.

Probably the most famous adventure is when Don Quixote imagines a number of enormous windmills in the distance to be giants. Although Sancho Panza tries to stop him, Quixote takes off on a full gallop on Rocinante, his flea bag steed, and proceeds to nearly kill himself running headlong into one of the windmills. His lance sticks into one of the great turbines and breaks into a thousand pieces, and Quixote and Rocinante are lifted up and thrown across the field. When Sancho Panza tries to get his master to come to his senses and snap out of it- Quixote has a brilliant reply that allows him to stay in this fantasy. Yes, he agrees they are windmills, he can see that now, but, he says, they are only windmills because an enchanter has transformed them.

And why does he do all this? What keeps him going after ruffians beat him up time after time? Same thing that causes most of us do foolish things, too: love. Every knight needs a lady, and at the very start of his journey Quixote transforms a simple peasant girl, Aldonza, whom he loved but never loved him back, into the great princess

Dulcinea del Toboso. And every one of his adventures he did in her glorious name, perhaps the very definition of madness in love.

Now, believe it or not, all this brings us to our text for this morning- our incredibly strange story of David's reaction to the death of King Saul. Now who are David and Saul? A couple of weeks ago you heard Chris preach an absolutely fabulous sermon about how when God was unhappy with Israel's first king, Saul, and how he went to find a new king and found him in the shepherd boy David. Well between that sermon and this one a lifetime has transpired between Saul and David. Saul, troubled by brutal mental illness, did not bear leadership well. He was particularly harsh with the young David- growing insanely jealous when the women of the court sang that Saul killed his thousands, but David his ten thousands. One time Saul was so filled with envy he threw a spear at David in an apparent attempt to kill the young man. From that point on, Saul tried again and again to have David killed until David fled from the court and lived like a bandit on the run where Saul's army tried again and again to assassinate the young hero.

And why? David had done nothing wrong. All he had done was to serve Saul faithfully in every possible way. But instead of thank you cards, Saul sent spears instead.

This is why I'm utterly astounded at our text this morning- because here we stand over David's shoulder as he learns that Saul, his arch enemy, his Lex Luthor, is no more. And how does David react? Now at the very least I would expect him to be pleased- maybe sad at Jonathan's loss, but at least pleased he didn't have to deal with Saul any more. I could even see him being ecstatic- remember this is the same David who leaps and dances before the ark when he parades it back into Jerusalem after capturing it from

the Philistines. I mean what would you do if you learned the person who has made your life a living hell was stopped for good? But what do we get? We get a weepy David, mourning Saul, actually singing over him: “How the mighty have fallen! O daughters of Israel, weep.” David cries out: “Weep over Saul beloved and lovely.”

And this blows me away. Why on earth does David react like this? How is he able to see Saul as anything but a monster? Now this is madness indeed.

It’s the same question we have of Quixote. Why? Why on earth does he run around getting himself and Sancho Panza in trouble and nearly killed? Why does he run around going hungry with a chamber pot on his head pretending to be a knight when he so obviously isn’t? Well, the answer lies in the other half of Nietzsche’s quote, that if there is always some madness in love, it is also true that there is always some reason to be found in madness. See, the great truth of Don Quixote, the great reason in his madness, is that in his delusion, in his fantasy, Quixote actually sees the people around him more clearly than anyone else. The great truth of the book is that Quixote in his madness is the only one able to see others for who they really are.

Take Sancho Panza. We as readers see him as this stupid, sarcastic farmer bringing welcome comic relief to this long book. Quixote on the other hand sees nothing less than a noble, faithful squire, following wherever his leader goes. It took me awhile to realize that in his delusional state Quixote is actually right- Panza does stick with his master through thick and thin, and though you and I might not always see it, Panza is undoubtedly the most noble character in the book.

And the same goes for his lady Dulcinea. At one point Sancho Panza tries to clue Quixote into the fact that his 'ladyship' is really this coarse farm girl not worth his time. Quixote tells Panza that he simply isn't seeing her clearly- that common Aldonza really is majestic Dulcinea and that she is fair and wise and kind. And again it took me awhile to realize it, but in his madness Quixote sees better than we do- where you and I might see this common peasant, uneducated, and hardened by work- Quixote sees what we miss- he sees nothing less than a princess, kind and more beautiful than Helen. Unlike Sancho Panza and you and I, so grounded in our limited perceptions, Quixote sees what's possible in others. Or to put it in another way- he sees others as God does.

So if it's true that there is madness in love, there is divine reason even in this madness.

And so it was in Mexico, too. You know we lived something of a fantasy as well, last week. Like Quixote, we went back in time in a way. Although rather than just a few hundred years like him, we tried to go back two thousand years. Part of the ethos of AMOR ministries is to live and work together like Jesus and his disciples. And we did. Though they would have been so helpful- we didn't use power tools. We used hand tools like the carpenter we follow. (Honestly, I think some of our hand saws might have been from the first century as well as they worked.) We slept on the ground like disciples- although I don't remember the disciples having to put up with an infestation of ear wigs and stink bugs like we did. Every night we gathered around a great fire as I imagine Jesus and the crowd following him might have done. On our last night Bruce stood up in

front of that fire with the shadows playing across his face, took the bread and the cup, and recited the very same words Jesus did so long ago.

And it was in this fantasy, this kind of madness, that I learned to see a little bit more clearly. I was on a team that was building a double, which is basically four rooms for a family rather than two. The family we were working for was living in a kind of plywood, cardboard shell with blankets for walls. They had two boys, Manuel and Felipe, running around, and they had a little girl, Jennifer, who was about 3 ½ or 4. The mom was around most of the time. She actually cooked for the crew nearly every day. She couldn't afford it- but it was something she obviously wanted to do.

Despite this amazing kindness, I noticed that week that I felt uncomfortable around her. I tried several times that week to get to know her- but she had absolutely no English, and my Spanish enables me to say helpful things like “Where is the bathroom?” and, a phrase I learned on the trip, “Pardon me, there is a cat in my pants.” (Believe me it was funny at the time.) Funny, but not helpful. And so without the ability to communicate, it was like there was a wall between us. Even though in my head I knew she is just like me in all the ways that are important, it was so hard for me to see her as a real person with hopes and dreams just like I have. For me she was like this short, round, silent being, an alien presence. I can only imagine what I seemed like to her.

But then, at the end of the week. When we had finished our work. We had our ceremony where we handed over our keys. The kids had come up with things they wanted to say to bless the house. These were translated into Spanish and read. And then, our property-of-Jesus foreman had us circle up and had us do the most wonderful thing. He had us pass the keys to the front door from person to person until we finally handed

them over to the family. And it was the most amazing thing- these wild, hilarious, rambunctious kids were the most silent I had seen them all week. Some of them took the keys and passed them on quickly. Some of them held them in their hands, feeling their weight. Finally, the keys came around to the family. I saw the keys in the hands of mama, tears streaming down her face. She didn't say anything and she didn't have to. She held the keys to her heart and then she gestured to us from her heart over and over again.

And just like that- I saw her for exactly who she is, a parent who cares for her kids just like me, a mom who just wanted her kids to get sick less by sleeping on a foundation instead of the dirt, and a queen more beautiful than Helen.

And you know, I think that's what happened with David, too. In spite of all of the things Saul had done to him, in spite of having to live like a bandit in the hills, when David heard Saul was dead- suddenly none of that mattered. A kind of wild love, the kind the God's Spirit blows into us from time to time, came over David and he saw and remembered Saul through God's eyes- he saw him as a royal man, as God's anointed. And this wasn't a time to rejoice- it was a time to see, to really see, and to sing.

Beloved, there is always a little bit of madness in love, and there is always a little bit reason in madness. My prayer for each of us this week is that we're a little less sane- a little less sure that we've got everything and everyone figured out. May we be a little more crazy, and a little more open to the madness of the Gospel- where the fallen are

remembered as kings, peasants are valued as princesses, and blind gringos have their eyes opened to the royal mamas in their midst. **Amen.**