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## WORD MADE FLESH

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Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
**Vengeance and the Life of Forgiveness\***

Exodus 17:8-13; Psalm 120/121; 2 Timothy 3:14 - 4:2; Luke 18:1-8

At the conclusion of the reading from Exodus 17 we proclaim, "This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God." "Thanks be to God" for this, the beginning of what will be a seemingly endless blood-feud between the small tribe of Amalekites and their neighbours, the Israelites? This is the first account of the battle of Rephidim and we find a variant on the tradition with the attack at Hormah (Numbers 14:45). And it goes on. There is the battle at Moab (Judges 3:13), and, under the direction of Samuel, Saul enters into a war to exterminate the Amalekites. The mantle passes to David who engages in numerous battles with his neighbours.

First Samuel is replete with these endless tales of death and destruction. Blood-feud, to avenge the memory of the victim. What is "the word of the Lord" here in this text? What is "the word of the Lord" now that we read it in the light of all that is to follow? The battles are not the triumphal actions of God's people on earth. Exodus and First Samuel tell us that vengeance begets vengeance begets vengeance, not that if you have God on your side you can destroy the Amalekites, whoever they might be.

The Gospel is hardly less problematic as we listen to Jesus' parable about a judge, a self-serving judge "who had neither fear of God nor respect for man." He is finally bullied into acting on behalf of natural justice by a widow with virtually no rights under the law. The final sentence of the Gospel, almost as an after-thought, gives us a key when we are asked, "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?"

Within today's lesson we have one of the prettier passages in which the Apostle is calling the early Christian community to a full appreciation of the implications of their faith. It is, the Apostle says, the duty of the redeemed, in the name of Christ's "Appearing and of his kingdom" to "proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience - but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching." Proclaim the message that God is love and that creation, despite the terrors of history, has its meaning and fulfilment as the place of communion. Proclaim the Gospel of forgiveness, its truth, and how obedience to this truth is the path to life. Challenge those who proclaim vengeance as affirming of life and identity, and call them to obedience "with patience and the intention to teaching."

Do this and, "when the Son of Man comes," there will not only be those who are exercising justice simply because they are bullied, but those who are faithful, living the life of co-suffering love, the life of forgiveness, the life of blessing and healing within a broken world.

In the life and being of the faithful there is no triumphalism, no vengeance to equal past injustice, no being bullied into right action. For those who have glimpsed the Incarnation and Calvary, have stepped into the kingdom of God, there is only a life of forgiveness, blessing, and healing.

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