



Ulysses

People who know me know that one of my literary loves is poetry. I read and love verse from a whole range of contexts and backgrounds, across many different period of history. And one of my favourite poems of all time is Ulysses by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

Now, Tennyson is a somewhat controversial figure these days. Like many prominent individuals from the 19th century and first half of the twentieth century, Tennyson is being re-assessed through the lens of post-colonial and post-imperial critique. Viewed from that perspective, Tennyson is a somewhat dubious cultural figure, often seen as a cheerleader for colonialism and empire. The fact that he was Poet Laureate for most of Queen Victoria's reign and wrote poems such as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, as well as criticisms attacking Prime Minister Gladstone's attempts to provide the Irish with autonomy through "home rule", have resulted in Tennyson himself being labelled a colonialist and a supporter of oppressive government.

The truth, of course, is rather more complex, and Tennyson was arguably both more conservative and more progressive than either his detractors or supporters will allow. However, regardless of the view one might take of his politics, it is unarguable that Tennyson was a supremely gifted poet, and many of the works he produced have not only achieved enduring acclaim, but have also become proverbial (and, ironically, are often mis-attributed to Shakespeare, for example, "tis better to have loved and lost" and "the old order changeth").

And that brings us back to Ulysses. Based on the Greek myth of the hero Odysseus (Ulysses is the Latinised spelling), it tells the story of Ulysses as an old man, reflecting back on his long reign over a turbulent people who have forgotten his great deeds and do not appreciate the marks of civilisation which he has stamped upon them. A counter-balance to the hero-worship of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Ulysses is a meditation of the futility of ambition and the transience of glory.

Yet what saves Ulysses from being a stultifying lament about days past and the loss of capacities that come with age is the note of hope that sounds throughout the piece. While recognising the unavoidable truths that come with the passage of time, the narrative voice of the poem declares that the dignity of life itself does not fade; and the passing on to new generations of work that has yet to be completed is not the loss of power or standing, but the necessary handing on of tasks in a labour that itself spans generations.

And that should caution us against any sense of "failure" or having not "passed on a legacy". Jesus, after all, had relatively few followers (despite the large crowds that were drawn to him during his lifetime) at the time of his death, when he bequeathed to the disciples the work of proclaiming the Gospel. He did not have buildings or property or recognised social status. In many conventional respects, Jesus was a "failure". Yet what he passed on was a legacy of hope, a proclamation that weakness and vulnerability do not undermine dignity, and that the "success" or "failure" of our life together is not dependent upon those measures which the world and our culture recognise as legitimate and authoritative.

These are difficult time for both the church as a whole and for the Heathmont community. The choices that lie before us are not easy ones to contemplate. Yet the choices we do make and the implications which arise therefrom are not the indicators of whether or not we have "failed" as a congregation. A greater

narrative abides: the narrative of God's faithfulness, which does not promise us "success" or freedom from suffering, but which allows us to experience the realities of our humanity in the knowledge that God has experienced those realities too - so that they no longer have the final word in human life, but are instead contained within the love of God.

And although, by his own admission, Tennyson was somewhat unorthodox in his own thinking about God, he, too, nonetheless understood that human narratives were contained within the narrative of the divine - and because of that, we are able to live in hope. And this rings through clearly in the last lines of Ulysses:

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Remember In Your Prayers

Sadly, we must convey news of the recent death of David Ingamells, who died on Monday morning after his health declined sharply over the weekend. Please pray for Alison Ingamells and the whole Ingamells family, that God's grace and peace will be with them at this sad time.

Please also continue to remember Ross Scholes-Robertson, Pam Woolcock, and Betty Wallace as they continue their recovery from recent injuries and hospital stays.

Four U News

The next Four U gathering will take place in the Fellowship Room on Monday 8th April at 2pm. Ron Fry from Ringwood Movie Makers will be speaking. For full details please [click this link](#).

HUC Annual Report

For those folk who were not able to attend the AGM last Sunday, attached is a copy of the 2023 HUC Annual Report. To read the report, please [click this link](#).

CPP Presents - Little Women

The CPP will be presenting the stage version of Louisa May Alcott's classic, "Little Women". Performances begin on April 5th, and include a mix of evening, matinee, and early afternoon shows. Full details can be found by [clicking this link](#).

Blessings,

Brendan



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