

I expect most of you know the saying, which goes:

For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost.
For the want of a shoe, the horse was lost.
For the want of a horse, the rider was lost.
For the want of a rider, the battle was lost.
For the want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

The moral of which is of course, little things matter.

I would like to give the story a prequel. Why was there no nail? Because he came to work with a hangover. Why did he have a hangover? Because when he had gone home the previous evening his wife had shouted at him because he walked his great muddy boots over her newly cleaned floor, so went off down the pub. Why did his wife shout at him? Because at work that morning her boss had accused her of a mistake she hadn't committed. And so one could continue.

What I am saying is that actions have consequences. When we are hurt, we are very prone to retaliate by hurting back or going off and venting our anger on someone else, but the cycle of hurt and retaliation can be stopped.

Abigail in the first book of Samuel, Chapter 25, is a wise woman, When her husband antagonizes David and he is bent on revenge she realizes that she must be an agent of reconciliation. It was quite a dangerous thing to do, but risking her life, she goes to meet David with provisions in the hope that his anger will be calmed and disaster for her household averted. What can we learn from her?

She took the blame herself "Let the blame be on me alone." Seeing her husband's fault she offered herself to David in effect saying "Whatever you intend to do to him, do to me".

In the Bible Israel is often described as God's spouse. "I have betrothed you to me for ever," but time and time again she proves to be an adulterous wife, going after other Gods, and forsaking the covenant.

In this case it is the "husband", God himself who enables a reconciliation by sending his Son to live as a fully human being on earth and to do what no other man or woman could do – say to God "Whatever you intend to do to them, do to me." He sacrificed himself on our behalf and as both perfect God and perfect man could reconcile the world to God the Father.

We too as part of the Body of Christ are called to be reconcilers, we are ambassadors of Christ and not only do we need to preach the message that Jesus has reconciled us to God by his passing death, and because his was the perfect sacrifice made once for all, it resulted in his resurrection and ascension, we also have to live this mystery in our lives.

We have only to look at what is happening in the world to see how violence breeds more violence. We need to have the courage to step in between the violent factions and say "let the blame be on me" There is probably very little we can do on the world sphere, but remembering the story about the nail and its prequel, we can do little things, and they do matter. Our actions have consequences.

When things go wrong and we are the recipients of other people's sins, instead of compounding the sin by hurting someone else we must try and absorb it. This is of course what Jesus did all his life. He was misunderstood, accused of all kinds of wrongdoing and was finally unjustly condemned to death and crucified. But he didn't retaliate with physical violence. That doesn't mean he was always meek and mild; he could be very sharp and scathing whenever he came across hypocrisy or the kind of mentality, which calls good evil and evil good. We too need to be courageous, name the injustice, protect the weak,

and work for peace and reconciliation sometimes by putting ourselves between the two parties at odds and often being hit by both sides. Being a shock absorber I call it.

For it is a fact that if we try to promote peace and reconciliation in the wider sphere of the world, without looking at the relationships that are nearer to us, our efforts will have little success. It is very little use praying for peace between Israelis and Palestinians if we are not in peace with members of our families, neighbours, workmates, and people in our church, and doing that is far more difficult.

Here is where we must not despise the little things. Small actions can have big consequences. As an example: the south African writer and friend of prince Charles, Laurens Van der Port, in 1926 in Pretoria gave a cup of coffee to 2 Japanese men. A very small act of kindness. As a result of that encounter, he became interested in Japanese culture and learnt the language. In 1942, he was part of the allied forces in the Far East fighting the Japanese and was taken prisoner of war. With his knowledge of the Japanese language and customs, Laurens Van der Port was able to act as a mediator between his captors and his fellow prisoners and on several occasions was able to mollify the anger of the Japanese. He was convinced that because of this he saved his own life and that of many of his companions. Lives saved by a kind act of giving two cups of coffee.

And so we must work to be agents of reconciliation in our own locality. Little things like a welcoming smile. Who knows whether the smile or the courtesy done to a complete stranger may not have enormous effects for good, whereas a frown, scowl or brusque reply may have the opposite effect. Little acts of kindness, reframing from criticizing, trying to understand why people act as they do, continuing to hold out the hand of friendship even when it is rebuffed, not retaliating in kind when hurt, trying to forgive and love all those people who have wounded us, giving people the benefit of the doubt; an apology can defuse a situation remarkably quickly. All help to build up the Body of Christ while their opposites lead to disintegration. It means all the time thinking of other people's welfare rather than "my needs, my rights".

By ourselves, we cannot do these things; we need to pray to God for grace to see our own shortcomings and for strength to do something about them, and then to try and cooperate with God's grace. It is the work of a lifetime and we must not become despondent if our efforts are not crowned with success immediately. We can all do our little things and be like Abigail, agents of reconciliation, and by our faithful perseverance – who knows? It may be that as a result the nail is ordered, the kingdom is not lost and the Kingdom of God may be brought nearer. Amen.