

A Letter to the Huddersfield Circuit

Dear Friends,

When we studied Hebrew texts at college we only ever got as far as the third chapter in Genesis. So it wasn't until quite recently that I came across a fascinating feature of chapter four, hidden away in the story of Cain's murder of his brother Abel. It occurs in verse eight, once Cain has become angry at the rejection of his offering. The Hebrew text runs:

Cain said to his brother Abel.....And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

As it stands the first sentence is incomplete and so seems to make no sense, which is why translators usually add in Cain's words: "Let us go out into the field." Yet it is perfectly possible that the original author deliberately left this gap to encourage us to pause and to wonder. It marks the space between Cain speaking to Abel and committing the act of violence. It is the *space of choosing*, the interval during which Cain makes his decision as to how he intends to act. The dots of suspense are crucial.

Let me introduce you to two other characters who find themselves in a similar *space of choosing*. Lollipop and Legless are two of the *Captains of the Sands*, a gang of orphans and runaways who live by their wits in order to survive in the shantytowns of a Brazilian coastal port in Jorge Amado's 1930s novel. In consecutive chapters Lollipop and Legless find themselves caught in intense moments of moral decision-making. Lollipop, a devout convert to Christianity, sees for sale a small model of Mary and her infant Jesus. Both mother and baby appear poor and malnourished, in desperate need of love and care. Mary is not cradling her child, but holding him loosely as if, in her poverty, she is looking to give him away. Lollipop finds himself emotionally drawn to this image, wanting to take both mother and son away to love them, but he has no money and is not used to paying for things anyway! He agonises over what to do, knowing that it is wrong to steal, but feeling overpowered by the need calling out to him from the image in front of him.

Legless is good at getting rich people to feel sorry enough for him to take him into their homes for a few days, during which he spies out the whereabouts of the valuable possessions, before leaving and informing other gang members how best to execute the burglary. This time, however, he finds himself becoming emotionally attached to the family, experiencing the kind of affection and generosity which leaves him feeling torn in his loyalties. Can he bring himself to betray those who are treating him with such a warmth and kindness that is even tempting him to stay in his new home? But can he let his friends down and fly in the face of the group solidarity on which all the gang members depend for their survival?

Amid all the questions that the Covid-19 crisis has opened up for us - about space and distance, time and rhythm, separation and loss - key issues around the *space of choosing* become increasingly significant.

What difference *is* this all making to how we live life now?

What difference *will* this make to how we live life in the future?

What difference *do we want* this to make to how we live life now and in the future?

There may be patterns of living which you are finding attractive and liberating, as well as frustrating and stifling. There may be ways of working which feel more worthwhile and productive as well as more limiting and separating. We are all discovering more about ourselves.

But the *space of choosing* takes us beyond the questions that focus specifically on our own lives. It asks us to listen more intently to the differences that our society and our world are calling out for – social, cultural and economic differences. It is the critical interval in which we ponder the way the world works in order to make choices that might enable it to work differently. The dots are crucial.....

With my best wishes

David