

## Agincourt, Afghanistan, and Another way of being...



One of the best-known speeches written by William Shakespeare is found in his play, *Henry V*. In this, Henry is imagined to be rallying the English troops before they fought in the Battle of Agincourt:

“This story shall the good man teach his son; and Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by, From this day to the ending the world, but we in it be remembered – **we few, we happy few, we band of brothers;** for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile, this day shall gentle his

condition; and gentlemen in England now-a-bed shall think themselves accursed they were not here, and hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks that fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day...”

I remember hearing this uncritically as a young man. I found it easy to think that the young Henry actually spoke those words, and that inspired by them a vastly outnumbered English army defeated the French force. Interesting that in the dining hall of The Southport School the words “we few, we happy few, we band of brothers...” are engraved above the high table and that generations of young men have been formed by these words.

Easy to forget that the words were written by an English playwright in 1599, 184 years after the Battle of Agincourt – which happened on the 25 October 1415. So...Henry could not have said these words, but we like to think he did! We like the idea of an underdog triumphing against the odds, like David defeating Goliath, and forget the technology that enabled what happened. David used a slingshot to kill Goliath from a distance, and the English had their longbow who could rain death seamlessly on cavalry and infantry from a distance. For some years before this battle it was common practice, and expected, that English men would practise with their bows for two hours each day after church so that they would be ready to use this skill if their country called them to arms.

Perhaps Shakespeare could have imagined other words in the mouth of Henry that day, “we few, we well prepared and well-armed few...we band of brothers...” But, the word “happy” makes it retrospectively sound like a joy-filled thing. That’s before the problematic language of men gloriously shedding their blood for king, country and reputation without reference to the heartache of women who became widows, children who became orphans, or mothers who never got to see their sons again. No mention of men becoming so injured – physically and psychologically – that they would never work again, and forever struggle in a society that had no welfare safety net.

Though we know all these things now, why is it that we still portray violent conflict as a glorious thing in movies and computer games?

When news of the Taliban’s triumph in Afghanistan became known I was uncomfortably reminded of this speech, thinking how those leaders could have offered variations over the years, in Dari or *Pashto*...“we few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother...”

I guess we could imagine Jesus saying to his disciples, “we few, we happy few, we band of [sisters and] brothers...” because the odds were definitely against them. However, his vision and his way of being in the world

seemed to consistently offer something different to violent pathways in conflict for we remember him saying, "Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you..." (Matthew 5.44).

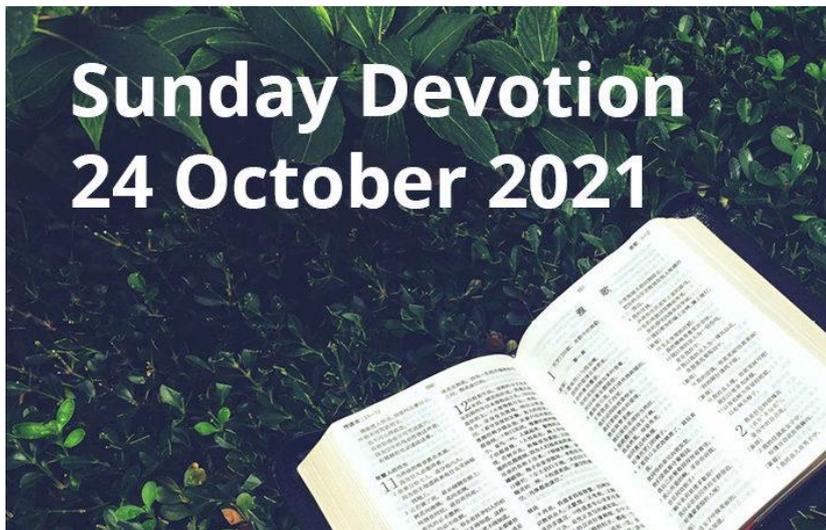
What would Shakespeare have made of that?

What do we?

**Sunday Devotions • Monday 18 October 2021 • By Mamuor Kunpeter**

## **Sunday Devotion: 24 October 2021, Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost**

With truth's bitterness comes blessing



**Main Readings:** [Job 42.1-6, 10-17](#); [Psalm 34.1-8 \(19-22\)](#); [Hebrews 7.21-28](#); [Mark 10.46-52](#); [Jeremiah 31.7-9](#); [Psalm 126](#)

**Supplementary Readings:** [Psalm 110](#); [Mark 12.28-37](#); [Job 42.7-9](#); [Psalm 126](#); [Hebrews 8.1-6](#)

"The Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning" ([Job 42.12](#))

When I was growing up the only man in my village in South Sudan who believed in Jesus was my uncle, Paul Majak, as everyone else worshipped the local gods. In a single year, my uncle lost five children who were killed at different times in bomb explosions, in childbirth and while fighting in the war. He also lost his wife in the same year while she was giving birth.

Villagers made fun of him, asking him in a teasing way where his God was now as he had lost his wife and all of his children, except one daughter, within 10 months. Despite losing so much, he remained obedient to God like Job and continued to praise him. The courage he showed through his affliction eventually inspired other villagers to worship Jesus as the true God. Now, there is a big church in my village. Many years later, I spoke to him on the phone and he told me that he had been blessed like Job in his later years, as God had blessed him with more children.

Both my uncle and the story of Job have taught me that the most important things are faith and trust in God. If we have faith and trust in God, we can leave the rest to God.

The trials of the righteous are often so many, but with obedience, faith and trust God will set us free from our affliction.