

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C
1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13
1 Corinthians 15:45-49
Luke 6:27-38
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In 2003, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City presented a film series called, "The Hidden God: Film & Faith." In the the process of deciding which films should be included in the series, the museum solicited suggestions from thirty-five authorities in the areas of literature, religion, and film. By a wide margin, the experts' most frequent recommendation was the 1993 romantic comedy, "Groundhog Day." Buddhists, Jesuits, Hasidic Jews, Fundamentalist Christians - believers of virtually every stripe - agreed that "Groundhog Day" best gave cinematic expression to their spiritual teachings.

I imagine most of you have seen the film. In it, Bill Murray plays Phil Connors, a cynical, cruel, deeply-unhappy weatherman at a Pittsburgh television station. Phil, his producer, Rita (played by Andie McDowell), and a cameraman, set off for Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania to cover the annual Groundhog Day festivities. Toward the end of the day of the festival, the area is paralyzed by a blizzard that prevents Phil and his colleagues from returning to Pittsburgh, so he returns to his bed and breakfast to spend another night. When he wakes up in the morning, he discovers that it isn't the next day. Rather, the day he has just lived through repeats itself. No matter what Phil does or doesn't do, he has to live that same Groundhog Day over and over again.

Once Phil has begun to come to terms with his strange circumstances, he tries day after Groundhog Day to seduce his producer, Rita. But no matter how much he learns about her, no matter how much he refines his technique, and no

matter how often he tries, he always fails. Finally, he realizes that the only way to get Rita to love him is to become the kind of person that a woman like Rita could love. He undertakes a long, disciplined regimen of self-improvement. He overcomes his selfishness. When, as a result, he finally wins Rita's love, the hitherto endless cycle of Groundhog days is broken, and Phil and Rita can share a future together.

Phil starts out believing that life is a game in which you exploit the other players in order to secure power and pleasure for yourself. He plays the game with diligence and cunning, but in the end he always loses. He is never satisfied. He is never happy. Only when he sees the futility of the whole cynical, world-weary game, can he set out on the path to real happiness. Only a graced insight from outside the ugly, power-driven, pleasure-driven cycle he has fallen into can save him.

It is much the same with David in our first reading. His enemy, King Saul, is sleeping at David's feet. By the rules of the ancient game of political self-aggrandizement, he should thrust a spear through Saul's heart and seize the throne for himself. He doesn't do it, because he knows it is wrong to harm the Lord's anointed. In other words, David acts not on the basis of the usual cynical calculation of self-interest, but by the light of a holy wisdom that transcends business as usual.

In our Gospel, Jesus offers a series of instructions that contradict the age-old conventional wisdom about how to succeed in life: "Love your enemies;" "To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other as well;" "Give to everyone who asks of you." It seems like he is telling us that everything we think we know about the way the world works is wrong. What he is really telling us that everything we think we know about finding meaning and satisfaction and happiness in the world is wrong. The conventional wisdom about amassing

power and pleasure at the expense of others is fallen wisdom for a fallen world. It doesn't bring happiness. It brings desolation and despair. It's a bankrupt, fossilized system that needs to be broken open so that the grace of God can flow in. Then with hearts of flesh, not hearts of stone, we can live lives that matter.