

JOAB SPEAKS TRUTH TO POWER

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It was told Joab, Behold, the king weeps and mourns for Absalom…. The king [David] covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, my son Absalom, Absalom, my son, my son! Joab came into the house to the king, and said, You have shamed this day the faces of all your servants, who this day have saved your life…;in that you love those who hate you, and hate those who love you. For you have declared this day, that princes and servants are nothing to you: for this day I perceive that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased you well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably to your servants; for I swear by Yahweh, if you don't go forth, there will not stay a man with you this night: and that will be worse to you than all the evil that has happened to you from your youth until now.

2 Sam. 19:1-7

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In this example of speaking truth to power, Joab didn't hesitate to speak truth to David concerning the public impact of his excessive mourning following the death of his favored but spoiled son, Absalom. Joab was a nephew of the king, and had been elevated to command of the king's armies for his valor. On this occasion, even though he knew it might cost him his life (he had slain the rebellious and treasonous Absalom), he confronted David with the truthful observation that the king appeared to love Absalom more than his loyal followers, and that if this behavior persisted it threatened to destroy his kingdom.

How many leaders have ever existed who dared to confront powerful dictators, kings, and presidents with the truth that their behavior threatened the very continuance of their rule and the existence of their nation? Who faced Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin with this charge? Some surreptitiously organized plots against Hitler (including Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Erwin Rommel), but ended up being executed. Stalin's enemies simply disappeared into prison camps. So confronting powerful leaders with truth is not exactly an easy task and does not often lead to an extended lifetime.

So what

about today? Are great world leaders hearing truth from their minions? Or are they usually hearing what they want to hear from followers cringing in fear that their subordinate positions might suddenly disappear? Do political considerations prevent leaders from hearing truth? Is political party survival more important than that of the people?

If you look

seriously at the American political situation today you may well come away with the belief that the public doesn't matter compared to the wishes of militarists and malefactors of great wealth. Who remains to face them with their malfeasance?

In Scripture

it was prophets who had this role. Almost without exception they faced imprisonment, death, or public ridicule for speaking the truth when leaders and their people did not wish to hear it. This was one reason why Jesus was killed---he said things that the Jewish temple authorities didn't want to hear and did things that at least indirectly threatened Roman power.

And where in

this struggle is the clergy of the land? More specifically, where is the clergy of your denomination or church? The Bible speaks truth to power on almost every page, so why don't modern practitioners of faith at least attempt to emulate it?

One problem

is that most of these examples appear in the Old Testament, that portion of the Bible many of us have assigned to quaint obscurity. But as the apostle Paul makes clear on several occasions (Romans 15:4, I Cor. 10:11), these events happened and are recorded in Scripture as examples for our learning so that we might have hope in the times when "the ends of the ages have come."

But at least

as important in directing our attention elsewhere is that we simple have not yet faced world problems sufficient to persuade us and our leaders that conferences, police actions, and military incursions will not solve our problems. Only God's will and way will be sufficient to face and deal with the collapsing institutions and failed governments now afflicting the earth. So let's begin speaking truth to power, with the hope and prayer that it might somewhere have the desired effect.