

Plough Sunday Reflections



1 Kings 19:19-21

Elijah went and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye," he said, "and then I will come with you."

"Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the ploughing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

A Farmer Reflects

I've heard of burning bras as a sign of freedom
and burning your boats as a sign of not going back,
but I've never heard of burning your plough.
Not that it doesn't have a great deal to commend it.
Have an ox roast at a farm sale
and give it a sense of celebration and freedom and choice.
The trouble is that the great god of economic forces
doesn't leave much room for choice,
and he squeezes out the sense of joy
before demanding the sacrifice of family farms.
The academics call it 'restructuring within the industry'.

Of course Elisha could kiss goodbye to his family
and to generations of farming
because he was called to something positive
- he was going to be a prophet,
advising Kings, healing Generals and so on.
It didn't pay but it was worthwhile.
But usually today, when a farmer is forced to give up, it is just that -
giving up.
Giving up purpose and pride, giving up home and hope.

So is it worth blessing the plough this year
or should we burn it?
Should we burn it in defiance,
like burning the flag of an oppressive power,
because sometimes farming in the 21st Century feels like an oppressive burden?

God Replies?

No, my son, don't burn your plough.
The plough is no sign of oppression.
The plough is a sign of toil and reward,
a sign of provision and plenty,
a sign productivity

If the rewards don't get back to the farmer
don't blame the plough or the soil.
They have done their work.
They have produced the food.
The land has yielded its harvest.
God has blessed us.

And people have taken the blessing for granted.
And they have taken the farmer for granted.
Children think that food grows on supermarket shelves
because that is as far as they have had to go to get it.
But if all the farmers burnt their ploughs
they would soon know better,
and all too late.
If all the farmers burnt their ploughs
we would be back to subsistence farming,
and widespread hunger,
and the collapse of all the civilisation
that has been built on successive agricultural revolutions.

So take pride in your plough.
Bless it, for it blesses you.
And, who knows,
you might be called to make a profit this year,
even if you're not called to be a prophet.

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