

*If someone turns from wickedness . . . and does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life.*  
*Ezekiel 18*

One adventure of Huckleberry Finn (Mark Twain's creation) located him separate from his friend, the runaway slave Jim, and wandering around at night on the swampy shore of the Mississippi below Cairo. A family offered him shelter in a log cabin whose interior was well furnished and showed a bit of culture. The man of the house was a stern fellow, suspicious of Huck, as were his two adult sons – until the mother showed concern for his wet condition and appetite. A younger son Huck's age (13-14) named Buck was introduced.

Huck noticed a certain wariness about the family – whose name was *Grangerford* (suggesting a farming background). They were concerned that he might be a member of the *Shepherdson* family. (You can see what's building up: the age-old hostility over land use: sod busting fence building farmers versus cowboys who wanted a wide open range for grazing, e.g. Cain versus Abel or the bloody movie *Shane* all over again!). The feud cast a pall over the home. Nobody remembered when or why it had started. Huckleberry asked Buck what was the trouble about – land? "I reckon maybe – I don't know." "Well, who done the shooting?" asked Huck. "Laws, how do I know? It was so long ago."

The Grangerford daughter Emmeline thus grew up fascinated by death. She wrote poems like "Shall I Never See Thee More Alas" and one about a dead bird titled "I Shall Never Hear Thy Sweet Chirrup More Alas." Every time someone died she always got there before the undertaker to write a "tribute". Hearing she herself had died, Huck "reckoned, that with her disposition, she was having a better time in the graveyard."

It wasn't long before the feud erupted while Huck was there and the menfolk of the Grangerford family, including young Buck, as well as several Shepherdson's, were slain! Huck immediately took off to reunite with Jim on the raft, saying "I was powerful glad to get away from the swamp . . . Other places do seem so cramped up and smothery, but a raft don't. You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft."

Huck wasn't a churchgoer. I doubt if he ever heard of the prophet Ezekiel (of our first reading today) but he would have agreed with him, because Ezekiel introduced our consciences to the idea of individual responsibility. Back in Ezekiel's day a popular proverb went: *Parents eat sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge*. In other words the current generation is trapped in the consequences of the prejudices of earlier ones and there's nothing you can do about. The past rules your destiny. Wars then? Wars tomorrow – always for more or less the same reasons! We yielded to the "wisdom" (for instance) of the framers of the Treaty of Versailles just one hundred years ago – and look what we've been through ever since.

But not so, says Ezekiel! And he warns: never let this proverb be repeated among you! For new generations need not succumb to the misguided biases of their ancestors; they can change, they have the right, the obligation to change and live in accord with the principles of God's commandments and – I add – the Sermon on the Mount, which I can safely say hardly influence the ideologies of most modern political pundits . In other words we can be free of the ways of the failed cycles of history and start a more godly way of behaving and being - if we dare. Or can we? Is there a raft nearby? Could it even be the Church?