

Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for Year A – Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (2nd Service)

Lectionary Readings: **1 Samuel 24: 1-17**
 Psalm 46
 Luke 14: 12-24

Did any of you watch the reduced scale Trooping of the Colour from Windsor Castle? One traditional element was performed by the massed bands of the Household Division - the slow march “Les Huguenots”. The music of this march is derived from a nineteenth Century French opera by Giacomo Meyerbeer; an opera based on the Catholic, Protestant division in France and culminating in the massacre of the Protestant Huguenots.

After the opening measures the the music builds to a climax - with flourishes the volume increases until the whole band in unison breaks into a tune associated with Martin Luther – “Ein feste burg ist unser Gott”.

Trans: Frederic Henry Hodge

Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott,
ein gute Wehr und Waffen.
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not,
die uns jetzt hat betroffen.
Der alt böse Feind
mit Ernst er’s jetzt meint,
groß Macht und viel List
sein grausam Rüstung ist,
auf Erd ist nicht seinsgleichen.

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work his woe;
His craft and power are great,
His craft and power are great,
On earth is not his equal.

Trans: Thomas Carlyle (MHB 494, H&P 661, STF 623)

A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He’ll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o’ertaken.
The ancient prince of hell
Hath risen with purpose fell;
Strong mail of craft and power
He weareth in this hour;
On earth is not his fellow.

This well known hymn, the “**anthem**” of the Protestant Reformation, written by Martin Luther is a free translation of Psalm 46.

The psalm itself opens with the glorious assertion “*God is our refuge and strength we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.*”

Whatever the time, whatever the circumstances, we have this assurance that God is with us. We may not be facing physical calamities such as the earth giving way or the mountains collapsing into the sea but we do live in times of unprecedented uncertainty. The psalmist’s confidence should be our confidence that the Lord is with us.

Verse 4 of the psalm reminds us of the vision of a much later writer – John and his description of the New Jerusalem: “*a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.*”

We began with music – the music of Meyerbeer, associated with the Protestant Reformation. Verse 10 reminds us of a ‘modern’ song. The Lord says to his people – says to each one of us:

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

*Be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God,
be still and know that I am God.*

*I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee,
I am the Lord that healeth thee.*

*In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust,
in Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust,
In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.*

(Anon)

It is a very quiet and contemplative song – one that hopefully draws us ever closer to knowing Him as our God. The Psalmist, proclaiming the words of the Lord, doesn’t leave it in quiet contemplation. The Lord proclaims that he will be exalted “*among the nations*” and “*in the earth.*”

How will He be exalted?

At Pentecost we read that the Spirit brings power and we remember Jesus giving His followers The Great Commission. (Matthew 28):

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Make disciples of all nations – “exalted among the nations, exalted in the earth”.

In so many of the hymns we love from our Methodist tradition, there is an initial appeal to turn to the Lord.

This is followed immediately by a call to offer Him to all, and to love and serve our neighbours as ourselves.

I remember a Local Preachers' Meeting in Croydon when our guest speaker was the Secretary of Conference (he lived in a neighbouring Circuit). I think he and our Superintendent Minister were shocked and offended when I suggested at one point that if John Wesley were to return he would disown us.

I leave that thought with you to ponder – have we lost something that was there, and very important, at the time the Methodist Movement came into existence?

Returning to our readings – we do not know the author of Psalm 46. The opening words however fit the situation in which we find David; our Old Testament reading continuing his story from 1 Samuel and his ongoing conflict with King Saul.

David has been anointed as King. He is a successful warrior – popular with his troops and with the people: *“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.”* It is clear from our reading today that David's men, knowing his destiny and a prophecy (?) which does not appear to be given elsewhere in the Old Testament, expect David to take advantage of the situation when Saul, unaccompanied, comes into the cave where David and his men are hiding.

David knows his destiny, his anointing, but he recognises that Saul is the first anointed King of the nation – David will do him no harm. We read, today, the dramatic story of David cutting off a corner from Saul's robe and almost immediately being conscience-stricken for even raising his hand this far against the Lord's anointed.

Our passage ends with apparent reconciliation – Saul admitting his bad treatment of David and the latter's righteous behaviour. If we read beyond verse 17 two things become clear:

¹⁷ ‘You are more righteous than I,’ he said. ‘You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. ¹⁸ You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD gave me into your hands, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹ When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. ²⁰ I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. ²¹ Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family.’

²² So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Firstly **Saul is in conflict with David because he knows David will inherit the throne**, not one of his own children. His dynasty will not be established.

If we turn back a chapter we find that David has won a great victory over the Philistines and saved the town/city of Keilah. On hearing that David and his men are inside the walls of Keilah, Saul considers him trapped and sets out with all his forces. Having consulted the Lord and finding that Saul will come looking for him and also that the people of Keilah will hand him over to Saul, David leaves for the desert. Saul searches for him in vain but his son Jonathan finds David.

¹⁵ While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. ¹⁶ And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God. ¹⁷ ‘Don't be afraid,’ he said. ‘My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You shall be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.’

Jonathan knows his destiny, is happy to play “second fiddle” to David – it is Saul who cannot accept this.

Secondly, **it is only an apparent reconciliation** – Saul returns home, David and his men go another way – they are not together.

The reconciliation does not last! Two chapters later we read that Saul, hearing of David's location, sets out with three thousand chosen men to hunt him down. David again spares Saul's life (the NIV heading to chapter 26). He comes across the camp of Saul at night and together with Abishai goes among the sleeping soldiers. Finding the recumbent Saul, Abishai immediately reminds David that *“God has given your enemy into your hands.”* He suggests *“Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear.....”* Once again David refuses: *“Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?”* He goes on to say that Saul's fate is in the hands of the Lord Himself. However, to demonstrate to Saul what might have been he takes away the King's spear and water jug. In the same way as in our reading today, David calls to Saul from a distance and shows the spear and water jug. Again Saul is penitent and asks David to come back but the chapter ends with Saul once more returning home and David going his separate way.

Our Old Testament readings from 1 Samuel continue and come to a conclusion next week.

Turning to the reading from Luke we are again reminded of those early days of the Methodist Revival. The offer to come to Jesus was made and accepted by so many. They knew, or were convicted of their need of the Lord.

In contrast - look at the excuses, made in the parable, for not responding to the banquet invitation. “I've just bought a field and must go and have a look at it”; “I've just bought five yoke of oxen and I must see how well they work”.

Some of you will have heard me give this illustration from the pulpit.

Many years ago, I was invited to Sunday lunch by one of my BB friends in Portsmouth (*a Baptist, but I won't hold that against him*).

We were driving along the long road where he lived and I commented that I saw his neighbours were busy at Sunday worship.

They were washing their cars! My friend was rather upset that I described it in those terms but on reflection it does reflect what is important to us.

Do we make excuses? Are they like the two examples from the parable concerned with material things, or perhaps are they family related, "I've just married, so I can't come"?

How easy do we find it to say the words of the Covenant each year?

Yes - it is easy to read the printed text but to say those words and really mean them is very difficult.

The invitation to the feast is for all; for all who are prepared to say **"I am no longer my own, but Thine"**.

All to Jesus I surrender,
all to Him I freely give:
I will ever love and trust Him,
in His presence daily live.
*I surrender all,
I surrender all,
all to Thee, my blessed Saviour,
I surrender all.*

All to Jesus I surrender,
humbly at His feet I bow;
worldly pleasures all forsaken,
take me, Jesus, take me now.
I surrender all

All to Jesus I surrender,
make me, Saviour, wholly Thine;
let me feel the Holy Spirit,
truly know that Thou art mine.
I surrender all

All to Jesus I surrender,
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
fill me with Thy love and power,
Let Thy blessing fall on me.
I surrender all

All to Jesus I surrender,
now I feel the sacred flame;
oh, the joy of full salvation!
Glory, glory to His name!
I surrender all

Judson W. Van DeVenter (Mission Praise 25; Songs of Fellowship 1163)

Eric Brown