

## Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for Year A – Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (2<sup>nd</sup> Service)

**Lectionary Readings: 2 Samuel 2: 1-11. 3: 1**  
**Psalm 56**  
**Luke 18: 31 – 19: 10**

Samuel in his old age has passed away; Saul and Jonathan, as predicted, have been killed in battle with the Philistines and at last David is made king, but not King of Israel, as Saul had been, but King of Judah alone.

At the beginning of chapter 2 David and his men are in the ‘Philistine’ town of Ziklag. It is there he hears of the death of Saul and Jonathan and in the preceding chapter we read the well known lamentation of David:

*“Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on the heights. How the mighty have fallen! .....*”

*“Saul and Jonathan – in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted.  
They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions .....*”

Ziklag was a town, somewhere in Southern Judah – actual location unknown - that had been part of the allotment to the tribe of Simeon (Joshua 19). At some point in time it had been lost to the Philistines. David, fleeing from Saul, seeks refuge with Achish, King of Gath. David asks Achish to assign him a place of his own – Ziklag is given to him and we read in 1 Sam. 27 that it then belonged to the Kings of Judah from that time on.

David enquires of the Lord – *“Shall I go up to the towns of Judah?”* The Lord instructs him to go to the region of Hebron and it is there that he is established as King of Judah.

He goes up to Hebron accompanied by his two wives Ahinoam and Abigail. Don’t I have a vague memory that Saul gave one of his daughters to David to be his wife (A very Old Testament practice – the giving of wives!). At the end of 1 Samuel 25 (a passage that gives the account of Abigail becoming David’s wife) we read:

*“But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim”.*

Michal had earlier helped David escape when Saul sent men to watch his house overnight and kill him in the morning – she let him down through a window and placed an idol in bed in his place, earning her father’s extreme displeasure.

David’s lament for Saul has been mentioned and once again in this reading we note the place Saul held in David’s heart – the message he sent to the men of Jabesh Gilead for burying Saul. (In 1 Samuel 11 is an account of the first campaign by the newly anointed King Saul – the relief of besieged Jabesh Gilead – maybe that was why they showed the “kindness” mentioned by David in his message.)

*“May the Lord now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favour because you have done this.”*

The commander of Saul’s army, who had clearly survived the battle, takes Ish-Boseth – a surviving son of Saul, and makes him king over the greater number of territories including Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel.

This means the war between the houses of Saul and David has not come to an end and we are told it lasted for a long time.

The first verse of Chapter 3 tells us, however, that in this period David grew stronger and stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

David, as we have previously seen, was not perfect in his life – like Saul he was not perfect in the eyes of the Lord.

There is however one great difference between these two kings – David never lost his ultimate trust in the Lord, his reliance on the Lord for guidance in all that he did in leading the people of Judah and later the whole of Israel.

The Psalm is one written by David, a *miktam*. There are six psalms described in this way but their Biblical meaning is not clear as the word seems to be equivalent to the Babylonian word for “a metal pot cover”! The remainder of the heading is worth noting –

*“When the Philistines had seized him (David) in Gath”*

The Old Testament reading on June 14<sup>th</sup> (11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time) described the incident when David, alone and fleeing from Saul, goes to Nob, ‘deceives’ the High Priest into giving him the Shew Bread (for his non-existent men, on a secret mission for Saul), takes Goliath’s sword and flees to Gath – to seek refuge among the Philistines. He is recognised by them and becomes virtually a prisoner. Brought before King Achish he feigns madness and successfully saves his life.

It is only after the second time David has the opportunity to kill Saul but spares his life (previous week’s readings) that he decides to seek refuge among the Philistines and settles in Gath with King Achish. If we read some of the intervening chapters in 1 Samuel we learn that David and his men made frequent raids, bringing back much captured bounty to Gath – the story being that it had come from raids on Israeli settlements, another deception, he was actually attacking allies of Gath. By this means David becomes trusted and Ziklag was given to David and his men.

The Psalm fits David's situation perfectly. Verses 1-2, 5-9 describe the situation he is in – a fugitive from Saul, dwelling among a people that is naturally his enemy. Verses 3-4 and 10-13 express his confidence in the Lord.

*“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.  
In God, whose word I praise – in God I trust and am not afraid.  
What can mere mortals do to me?”*

That final sentence remind me of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in April 1945, at the time of his execution:

*“This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life....”*

We live in very uncertain times – times where they may even be fear. Unlike David we do not fear a human enemy but one that is far more insidious. We pray that like David we may place our confidence in the Lord, assured of our life with and in Him.

We have this confidence through Jesus – through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel reading opens with Jesus telling his disciples, for the third time, what is going to happen to Him.

We read that the disciples still didn't understand any of this – the meaning was hidden, they didn't understand the writings of the prophets. (Contrast this with the Day of Pentecost – Peter is spontaneously quoting the prophet Joel to explain what is happening!).

I can imagine some of the disciples' reaction – killed; but why? What does He mean by rising again?

The remaining two sections illustrate different approaches to Jesus. There is the curiosity of Zacchaeus. Maybe he was not prepared to meet Jesus directly because of his profession – hated by the Jews for serving a foreign power and more than likely corrupt, raking in money for himself on the side. He did want to see Jesus so he climbed the tree to ensure a good view. Jesus confronts him and is welcomed into his home.

The orthodox Jews mutter among themselves; you can imagine the comments!

The reply that Jesus gave:

*“Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.  
For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

“The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” – so central to the teaching of Jesus - think of parables such as the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost (prodigal) son. As a worldwide Church the 1990s we declared a decade of evangelism.

Was it successful for the Church, for us as individuals, did we seek and save the lost?

How much 'noise' did we, do we make as Christians?

The blind beggar, in our Gospel reading, certainly made a noise. He had to ask the crowd what was happening – when he understood that Jesus was passing he **knew** that healing was at hand.

He cried out to Jesus. The crowd told him to “shut up” but that only had the effect of making him shout even louder until Jesus did hear him.

There is confidence in his answer to Jesus –

*“Lord, I want to see”.*

The reply that Jesus gave –

*“Receive your sight; **your faith has healed you**”.*

There are a number of occasions in the Gospels where Jesus did not have to 'do' anything - the centurion's servant, the woman who touched his garments etc. Their faith was sufficient. Jesus told the centurion that He had not found such faith in all Israel.

David had confidence in the Lord being with him and guiding him; the blind beggar had complete confidence that Jesus could restore his sight; Zacchaeus displayed his confidence in a transformed life from the time when he actually encountered Jesus personally.

Our confidence is also in that personal relationship with Jesus, may we never lose sight of it.

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