

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

Lectionary Readings: 1 Kings 2: 10-12; 3: 16-28
Psalm 67
Acts 4: 1-22
Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

This week we have come to the end of a sequence of readings from 1 or 2 Samuel and commence seven weeks of readings from Kings. The two verses from chapter 2 tell of the passing of David after a reign of seven years in Hebron (Judah) and thirty three in Jerusalem as king over the whole of Israel. Solomon succeeds him on the throne of Israel.

In Deuteronomy we can read the ‘Decrees of the Lord’, delivered by Moses. In chapter 17 the Lord gives instructions for the time Israel would have a king – *“He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray”*.

We have previously seen that David had more than one wife – when he first went up to Hebron he was accompanied by Ahinoam and Abigail. (There had also been Michal, Saul’s daughter, wife of David; ‘given away’ to another man by Saul when he was in dispute with David, so effectively out of the picture.)

In 1 Chronicles 3 four further wives are listed; Maacah, Haggith, Abital and Eglah. All of these were delivered of a son during David’s time in Hebron.

We all know David ‘acquired’ a further wife after he moved to Jerusalem – ‘his heart being led astray’ by the sight of Bathsheba bathing on the roof of her house. We know of his dalliance with her, the unplanned pregnancy, his planning and arranging the murder of Uriah. When Nathan the prophet confronts David with the evil he has done he prophesies that David’s House will never be free of turmoil and bloodshed.

The child conceived by Bathsheba on that night dies in infancy but she later bears four more sons – Solomon being one of these.

We see then, that Solomon was not the eldest son of David – the one who might be expected to inherit the kingdom – but he was the one named as successor by David. During David’s reign his son Absalom attempts a coup and if we had read the first chapter of 1 Kings there was opposition to Solomon as king from Adonijah, another older son of the former king.

I am always intrigued that the blood line of David’s House continues through a son of Bathsheba, who only becomes David’s wife after ‘adultery’ and ‘murder’.

John Greenleaf Whittier perhaps echoes the same sentiment at the beginning of one of his hymns:

“Who fathoms the eternal thought?”

The reputation of Solomon, at the height of his powers, is one of Wisdom. In the OT reading today we find that famous account of two prostitutes, one baby (the death of a second baby, initiating their dispute) and the judgement of Solomon.

Was Solomon’s wisdom God given? If we answer - yes, for each time he delivers a judgement - then we can be assured that Solomon knows the outcome of what he is to say. Wisdom indeed.

If on the other hand he possessed nothing more than human wisdom I cannot but wonder what would have been the outcome if neither of the women showed any concern for the child!! Would he have gone through with his judgement of cutting the child in two? In making his judgement Solomon had clearly assessed the characters involved – he must have been a superb Psychologist! That too could have been a rare gift from God.

When the Queen of Sheba comes to Jerusalem (1 Kings 10 – our OT reading in 2 weeks time; and 2 Chronicles 9) she said to Solomon:

“The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard.”

Like David, Solomon initially puts his trust in the Lord but like his father he has to contend with conflict in his House during the latter days of his life. In 1 Kings 11 we read:

“King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter – Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. ² They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, ‘You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.’ Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love.”

In the same chapter it is recorded that Solomon had 700 wives of royal birth (!!!) and 300 concubines. We read that, as he grew old, his wives led him astray – towards other gods - he was no longer fully devoted to the Lord.

Remember that ‘Decree of the Lord’ from Deuteronomy concerning the wives of a king?

Passing over our Psalm, a Psalm of praise and confidence in the Lord, we come to the New Testament readings – not just the Gospel this week; there is also a reading from the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Peter and John have just healed the crippled beggar at the temple gate, who accompanies them into the temple *“walking and jumping and praising God”*.

He was recognised and people came running to Peter, John and the healed man. What an opportunity! – Peter made full use of it. As at Pentecost, he goes directly to the fact that God’s own people have killed His Son; that Jesus has been raised from the dead; and they, the disciples are witnesses. The beggar has been healed because of his faith in the name of Jesus.

As usual the ‘authorities’ are not happy. We don’t read of an arrest but rather that Peter and John were seized and imprisoned. The following day they are taken before the rulers, elders and teachers of the law including the High Priest and his family. A simple question is put to the disciples: *“By what power or what name did you do this?”*

Peter, once again filled with the Holy Spirit, ‘preaches’ to the Sanhedrin – *“it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed”*. He then quotes from Psalm 118 – the stone rejected by the builders that has become the most important stone in the building, the cornerstone.

The learned men of the Jewish Council observe two things – the courage of Peter and John and their ‘intellectual ignorance’, they were unschooled ordinary men. They also observed that they had been with Jesus. The evidence of the healed man was there in front of them – how could they deal with the disciples? They couldn’t deny the healing that had taken place, all Jerusalem knew about it by now; but they could warn the disciples to stop speaking about Jesus.

I wonder, if in a similar situation, we like Peter and John would have the courage to reply:

“Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

The Council threaten them further then let them go – they don’t dare do any more as all the people are praising God for what has happened. (We read that at the time the temple authorities seized Peter and John, many had heard the message and believed; that number growing to about 5000).

This is an embryonic Church, Spirit filled and Spirit led – “The Young Church in Action”.

Our Gospel reading commences with the disciples, having been sent out in pairs by Jesus, coming back to Him and reporting on their experiences. Because of the press of people, Jesus suggests that He and the disciples withdraw to some quiet place where they can all rest. Typically they set off by boat but are observed and no doubt their destination worked out – people from all the towns run to catch up with Jesus.

They get there first! There is to be no rest and Jesus starts to teach the crowd.

The Lectionary Reading from Mark 6 now jumps nearly twenty verses; it misses out the “feeding of the five thousand” and “Jesus walking on the water”. Immediately after feeding the crowd Jesus sends his disciples, ahead of him, to Bethsaida. Having dismissed the crowd he goes to a quiet spot to pray. An obvious observation – if Jesus needed to withdraw for quiet prayer, how much more of a necessity is prayer for us.

They don’t get to Bethsaida directly – after the storm and with Jesus in the boat, they end up across the Lake and anchor beside the shore in the region of Gennesaret. This was a fertile, populated area where Jesus often travelled and taught – the people recognised Him and immediately the sick were brought from all over the region. Such was the faith exhibited that people would beg to be allowed to just touch his clothes; confident that would bring the healing they desired, and it did.

We are reminded of the Roman Centurion who requested Jesus to “give the command” and his servant would be healed.

Jesus observed that “He had not found such faith in the whole of Israel”.

That Centurion experienced the ‘fruits’ of faith - they still exist today.

Author of faith, eternal Word,
Whose Spirit breathes the active flame;
Faith like its Finisher and Lord,
To-day as yesterday the same:

To Thee our humble hearts aspire,
And ask the gift unspeakable;
Increase in us the kindled fire,
In us the work of faith fulfil.

By faith we know Thee strong to save;
Save us, a present Saviour Thou!
Whate’er we hope, by faith we have,
Future and past subsisting now.

To him that in Thy name believes
Eternal life with Thee is given;
Into himself he all receives,
Pardon, and holiness, and heaven.

The things unknown to feeble sense,
Unseen by reason’s glimmering ray,
With strong, commanding evidence
Their heavenly origin display.

Faith lends its realizing light,
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
The Invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye.

Charles Wesley

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