

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

**Lectionary Readings:** 1 Kings 6: 11-14, 23-38  
Psalm 75  
Acts 12: 1-17  
John 6: 1-21

King David, as we read in 1 Chronicles 17, desired to build a House for the Lord, but the Lord had other plans.

*After David was settled in his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent.’*

<sup>2</sup> *Nathan replied to David, ‘Whatever you have in mind, do it, for God is with you.’*

<sup>3</sup> *But that night the word of God came to Nathan, saying:*

<sup>4</sup> *‘Go and tell my servant David, “This is what the LORD says: you are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. <sup>5</sup> I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt to this day. I have moved from one tent site to another, from one dwelling-place to another. <sup>6</sup> Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders<sup>[a]</sup> whom I commanded to shepherd my people, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’”*

Later in 1 Chronicles it becomes clear why David is not being allowed to build this first Temple; the Lord has chosen Solomon, son of David, for its construction. David meanwhile collects and prepares many of the materials required and charges Solomon with the ultimate job of building the Temple.

*Then David said, ‘The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.’*

### **Preparations for the temple**

<sup>2</sup> *So David gave orders to assemble the foreigners residing in Israel, and from among them he appointed stonecutters to prepare dressed stone for building the house of God. <sup>3</sup> He provided a large amount of iron to make nails for the doors of the gateways and for the fittings, and more bronze than could be weighed. <sup>4</sup> He also provided more cedar logs than could be counted, for the Sidonians and Tyrians had brought large numbers of them to David.*

<sup>5</sup> *David said, ‘My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendour in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it.’ So David made extensive preparations before his death.*

<sup>6</sup> *Then he called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>7</sup> David said to Solomon: ‘My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. <sup>8</sup> **But this word of the LORD came to me: “You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. <sup>9</sup> But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. <sup>10</sup> He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.”***

We come to the OT reading for today. The Lord renews, with Solomon, the vows that he made to David providing Solomon follows the Lord’s decrees. The building of the Temple is then described.

Dimensions are in cubits – how large were they? Internet investigation shows various sizes – for the ordinary cubit and for the sacred cubit. Assuming the latter for a Temple cubit we have a measurement of just less than 22 inches.

The dimensions for the Temple are given in 1 Kings 6: 15-22, the verses omitted from the reading. The Inner Sanctuary was box shaped – about 36 feet in length, width and height. The main hall, in front of the Inner Sanctuary was about 73 feet in length. Each of the Cherubim in the Inner Sanctuary was 18 feet tall with a wingspan also of 18 feet so that they from one wall to touching wingtips to the other wall across the available space.

Solomon’s Temple took seven years to build and was destroyed at the time of the Babylonian conquest and the beginning of the Exile. The historian Josephus records; "the temple was burnt four hundred and seventy years, six months, and ten days after it was built".

As we saw last week, Solomon was close to the Lord during the early part of his reign but in old age he, like so many others, he was led astray.

One Commentary has the heading ‘Justice is the Lord’s’ for Psalm 75. It is seen as a communal thanksgiving hymn and divides into four distinct sections, beginning with one verse of Thanksgiving. In verses 2-5 the Lord speaks, and this section is followed by a prophetic oracle (6-8). Verses 9-10 return to Thanksgiving but whereas verse 1 commenced “We praise you, God” verse 9 becomes personal to the Psalmist, “As for me, I will declare this for ever;....”.

Reference has been previously made to the Acts of the Apostles being “The Young Church in Action” – under the influence of the Holy Spirit. What a magnificent account is given in Acts 12. Herod has arrested and executed James, brother of John; the Jews are pleased and this encourages Herod to also arrest Peter.

No chances are taken with the Apostle – 16 soldiers (four squads of four) are ordered to watch over him. At night he is chained to a soldier or either side and the cell is guarded by further soldiers (the remainder of a squad?).

I am reminded of the body of Jesus in the tomb as recorded by Matthew, guarded by Roman(?) soldiers after the Jewish authorities have spoken to Pilate. Following the resurrection, the guard report what has happened to the chief priest and elders. They devise a plan – the soldiers are to say the disciples came during the night and stole the body away while they were sleeping! Should that get back to Pilate, the soldiers would be in severe trouble for sleeping on duty. The Jewish authorities promise to square matters with the governor – the soldiers accept the offered bribe and go along with the plan.

I wonder what happened to the soldiers guarding Peter overnight – the chains were still there attached to his attendants; the guards were in place on the prison cell, but Peter himself was gone! It is an interesting account – Peter believes he is dreaming or having a vision. In verse 7 we read that with the appearance of the angel of the Lord the chains fell from Peter’s wrists – we all know the lines of a verse inspired by this passage; “My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed Thee”. It isn’t until the angel leaves him a street’s length away from the prison that “*he comes to himself*” and makes for the house of Mary where followers of Jesus were gathered and praying. It would appear that they were not expecting the dramatic! I like Rhoda’s reaction on hearing the voice of Peter – not opening the door but running to tell the assembled company that Peter is outside, knocking on the door. They clearly did not believe her:

*You’re out of your mind,’ they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, ‘It must be his angel.’*

‘It must be his angel’ – in his ‘Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament’ John Wesley comments:

“It was a common opinion among the Jews, that every man had his particular guardian angel, who frequently assumed both his shape and voice. But this is a point on which the Scriptures are silent.”

There is astonishment when they realise it really is Peter outside but we don’t get any indication from the passage in Acts as to their reaction on hearing how he was brought out of prison. There is however practical action – Peter arranges for information re his escape to be passed on and then leaves for another place.

Like Peter, we believe that we are in the hands of the Lord – it is part of our Covenant relationship with Him.

We trust the Holy Spirit for guidance, but it still pays to be careful, to make sensible practical decisions.

As the corona-virus saga evolves and we prepare to open our church buildings for worship or to go more into our communities it is right we ask for guidance but also that we cautiously consider all of the physical risks involved.

Is there any more that this passage from Acts says to us today? Do we accept the ‘miraculous’ account of Peter being led out of prison in the dead of the night? Do we not believe it happened in this way or do we say to ourselves that it may have happened in New Testament times but God does not act in the same way in 2020?

Question – are we prepared to put a limit on the activity of God or are we willing to let the Holy Spirit work His will through us?

Jesus, You are changing me  
By Your Spirit You're making me like You  
Jesus, You're transforming me  
That Your loveliness may be seen in all I do  
**You are the potter and I am the clay**  
**Help me to be willing to let You have Your way**  
Jesus, You are changing me  
As I let You reign supreme within my heart

We come to our Gospel reading and immediately see why the NT reading last week, taken from Mark’s Gospel, omitted the Feeding of the Five Thousand and Jesus walking on the water.

Why did Jesus turn to Philip with the question about buying bread? John Wesley, in “his Notes” suggests:

“Perhaps he had the care of providing victuals for the family of the apostles.”

I have also heard the suggestion that Philip carried the “apostle’s purse – containing a half year’s wages. He is in effect saying to Jesus – we haven’t got enough to give each of them a bite, let alone a meal!

In contrast, Andrew sees the situation quite differently; the five small loaves; the two small fish; and Jesus. Then he seems to lose his confidence – “but how far will they go among so many?”

Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks and distributes it to the crowd. We read that those who received it had as much as they wanted – it’s the meal not just the bite that Philip had stated. Jesus then does the same with the fish - after they have had as much bread as they want! We read of the twelve baskets of bread filled with the ‘left-overs’ – how big is the filled basket in your imagination? It has been suggested that no traveller in those days would have set out on a journey, especially one into more remote areas, without food for the day – carried in a small shoulder slung basket. Each disciple probably filled one of these with the remaining bread.

The crowd begin to speculate about Jesus – he is in danger of being forced into an earthly kingship. I am sure He was reminded of the temptations that had come after His baptism by John in the River Jordan. One, rejected, course of action was to use His power in earthly terms.

At this moment, he withdraws from the crowd, going instead to a mountain. In Mark’s Gospel, last week, we read that after sending His disciples off to Bethsaida by boat He went up onto the mountainside to pray.

In John’s Gospel we read that the disciples set off across the Lake, heading for Capernaum. As in Mark, the weather turns against them and they are frightened when Jesus comes towards the boat, walking on the water. John doesn’t tell us, as Mark does, that the wind died down and the sea state settled when Jesus got into the boat; he simply states that they immediately arrived where they were going.

In the words of John Newton: (H&P 667)

Begone, unbelief;  
My Saviour is near’  
And for my relief  
Will surely appear;  
By prayer let me wrestle,  
And He will perform;  
With Christ in the vessel,  
I smile at the storm.

Though dark be my way,  
Since He is my guide,  
‘Tis mine to obey,  
‘Tis His to provide;  
Though cisterns be broken  
And creatures all fail,  
The word He has spoken  
Shall surely prevail.

His love in time past  
Forbids me to think  
He’ll leave me at last  
In trouble to sink;  
While each Ebenezer  
I have in review  
Confirms His good pleasure  
To help me quite through.

Why should I complain  
Of want or distress,  
Temptation or pain?  
He told me no less;  
The heirs of salvation,  
I know from His word,  
Through much tribulation  
Must follow their Lord.

\*\*\* *How bitter that cup  
No heart can conceive,  
Which He drank quite up,  
That sinners might live!  
His way was much rougher  
And darker than mine;  
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer,  
And shall I repine? \*\*\**

Since all that I meet  
Shall work for my good,  
The bitter is sweet,  
The med’cine is food;  
Though painful at present,  
‘Twill cease before long;  
And then, O how pleasant  
The conqueror’s song!

\*\*\* *Verse not included in Hymns and Psalms*

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