

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

**Lectionary Readings: 1 Kings 11: 41 - 12: 20**

**Psalm 86**

**Acts 14: 8-20**

**John 6: 35, 41-51**

We come, in our OT reading to the end of two eras. King David ruled over Judah in Hebron for 7 years and over the whole of Israel in Jerusalem for a further 33 years. His son, Solomon reigned for 40 years.

We remember the promise made to David, recorded in 2 Samuel 7:

*“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: <sup>12</sup> when your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. <sup>15</sup> But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.”*

We remember also David’s affair with Bathsheba and its consequences for David’s relationship with the Lord. (2 Samuel 12):

*Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: “I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. <sup>8</sup> I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. <sup>9</sup> Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup> Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.”*

As David draws near to death there are some machinations among his sons over the succession. David indicates that Solomon should follow him and in 1 Kings 2 we read of David’s charge to Solomon.

*When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.*

*<sup>2</sup> ‘I am about to go the way of all the earth,’ he said. ‘So be strong, act like a man, <sup>3</sup> and observe what the LORD your God requires: walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go <sup>4</sup> and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: “If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.”*

Solomon was full of wisdom; he also accrued great wealth and many, many wives from the royal families of the surrounding tribes. In doing this, he departed from (1) the law stating that the King should not have many wives and (2) the instruction against intermarriage with ‘gentile’ tribes. We read in 1 Kings 11:

*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter – Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. <sup>4</sup> As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.*

Today’s OT reading first records the death of Solomon and the succession to the throne of his son Rehoboam, whose mother was one of those royal princesses, an Ammonite by the name of Naamah. Another ‘main player’ this week is Jeroboam who had been a trusted official in the court of Solomon until he rebelled against the king and fled to Egypt - following a prophecy delivered to him by Ahijah,. (1 Kings 11: 26-40):

Also, Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon’s officials, an Ephraimite from Zeredah, and his mother was a widow named Zeruah.

<sup>27</sup> Here is the account of how he rebelled against the king: Solomon had built the terraces and had filled in the gap in the wall of the city of David his father. <sup>28</sup> Now Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labour force of the tribes of Joseph. <sup>29</sup> About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, <sup>30</sup> and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. <sup>31</sup> Then he said to Jeroboam, 'Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: "See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. <sup>32</sup> But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. <sup>33</sup> I will do this because they have<sup>[b]</sup> forsaken me and worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon's father, did. <sup>34</sup> "But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon's hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who obeyed my commands and decrees. <sup>35</sup> I will take the kingdom from his son's hands and give you ten tribes. <sup>36</sup> I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name. <sup>37</sup> However, as for you, I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. <sup>38</sup> If you do whatever I command you and walk in obedience to me and do what is right in my eyes by obeying my decrees and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. <sup>39</sup> I will humble David's descendants because of this, but not for ever.'" <sup>40</sup> Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon's death.

In our reading today, Rehoboam travels to Shechem to be confirmed as the King of Israel. News of Solomon's death and the succession of Rehoboam reach Jeroboam in Egypt; he returns to Israel and leads a delegation to the King asking for a less onerous work regime than that applied by Solomon. They, in return, promise to serve Rehoboam if he will do what they ask.

We find the King consulting two groups; 'the elders who had served Solomon' and 'the young men who had grown up with him'.

The elders tell the King that if he lessens the burden the people will be his servants. The young men urge him to not lighten the 'yoke' but to make it heavier. The king goes along with the advice of his contemporaries and 3 days later informs the people of his decision (1 Kings 12: 13-15):

The king answered the people harshly.

Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, <sup>14</sup> he followed the advice of the young men and said, 'My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.' <sup>15</sup> So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfil the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

This is the significant point in history when Israel is divided – ten tribes going with Jeroboam, leaving Rehoboam with just the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Benjamin, physically located between Judah and the 10 "lost" tribes became a junior partner of Judah. Unfortunately, neither Rehoboam or Jeroboam, at permanent conflict with each other, led their people in 'the way of the Lord' thus fulfilling the prophecy made to David that the sword would never depart from his house.

The people of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in about 722 BC and collectively have not been heard of again (hence reference to the 10 "lost" tribes). Judah was exiled to Babylon between 604 and 586 BC – we know some exiles returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah and it is through the tribe of Judah that we trace (Matthew 1) the ancestry of Jesus.

Today brings us to the end of readings of David and his family from 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, but for the moment we continue with a Psalm attributed to David - 'A prayer of David'.

Reading through the Psalm, verse 16 caught my eye:

Turn to me and have mercy on me; show your strength on behalf of your servant; save me, because I serve you just as my mother did.

Have you ever come across any other reference to the mother of David? I don't think I have! There is considerable information on the internet – from Jewish sources. We know the name of David's father, Yishai / Jesse. Jesse, in Jewish

writings is described as coming from an illustrious family and serving as head of the Sanhedrin. He was one of the most significant leaders of his generation and has specific mention in the Torah for his righteousness. Jesse was married to Nitzevet and produced a flourishing family. He then started, as a grandson of Boaz and Ruth, to have doubts about his own legitimacy – Boaz having married a woman from Moab. As a result, family relations broke down and it was only by ‘substitution trickery’, similar to that of Rachel and Leah, that David was conceived - Jesse having planned to have another son with Nitzevet’s maidservant. Once the deception was discovered and David had been born, he was not treated as a son by his father or as an equal by his brothers but rather reduced to the role of a servant. The community elders also despised and degraded him; only his mother stood alongside him in these days.

This brief background throws some light on the local reaction when Samuel comes to Bethlehem ‘to sacrifice’, but actually to anoint the next King of Israel.

If you want to read more on this very interesting and informative Jewish background, (I certainly learnt a lot), ‘Google’ “the mother of King David”. At the top of my search I was offered:

[Nitzevet, Mother of David - The bold voice of silence ...  
https://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article\\_cdo/aid/280331](https://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/article_cdo/aid/280331)

Given the origin (USA; Hasidic) I hope it is a reliable web-site for Jewish history, custom and practice!

Read again Psalm 86, in the light of this background – David is ‘poor and needy’, he suffers many set-backs but his confidence in the Lord remains and at the end of the Psalm he is able to write:

Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

In the reading from Acts, Barnabas and Paul, still on their first missionary journey, have sailed into Perga, travelled to Antioch (in Galatia), on to Iconium then to Lystra. They often encountered hostile crowds in the cities they visited. Here in Lystra the reaction of the crowd is quite the opposite when Paul commands somebody, unable to walk all their life, to stand - he jumps up and immediately begins to walk. We read that the man had been listening to Paul speaking and Paul saw that he had the faith to be healed – **Faith following reception of the Word.**

We regularly receive the word; it is familiar to us, so familiar perhaps that we overlook its dynamic properties?

I remember a conversation with somebody who had been ‘converted’ at university, my saying that I was envious of their experience, in contrast to the experience of growing up with a weekly input of the word. They replied, in turn, that they were envious of me that I had been brought up steeped in the Christian message!

We are reminded of words of James in his letter: “... ..*faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*”

The crippled man at Lystra heard, believed and acted on Paul’s instruction to “*Stand up on your feet*”.

The response of the crowds is to associate Barnabas and Paul with the gods they worshipped, with Zeus and Hermes. It is only with great difficulty and eloquent words from Paul that the people are prevented from offering sacrifices to them – bulls and wreaths having been brought from the temple of Zeus. Paul did manage to stop the sacrifice but did he really convince the inhabitants of Lystra that he and Barnabas were mere mortals? I wonder what was the subsequent relationship existing between the apostles and the town-folk?

Then the orthodox Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium. In the preceding chapter of Acts we read of the ministry of Barnabas and Paul in Pisidian Antioch and in Iconium. It is clear that some Jews accepted the Good News of Jesus, many Gentiles too and the ‘word of the Lord has spread throughout the region’. In Antioch it is the Jews who stir up opposition and persecution – they have the apostles expelled from the city. In Iconium two ‘camps’ were realised – those who sided with Paul and Barnabas; those who opposed them. The latter group, Jews and Gentiles, planned to stone the apostles but they got wind of the plan and fled to Lystra.

The Jews have come to Lystra and how the mood in the city changes. Initially wanting to offer sacrifices to Zeus and Hermes they are won over by these visiting Jews to the extent that they stone Paul.

Crowds are easily influenced, built up to mass hysteria. Remember the contrast between the crowd celebrating with ‘Hallelujahs’ as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and then ‘baying’ for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus on Good Friday.

Thinking they have killed him, the inhabitants of Lystra drag the body of Paul outside the city. The next verse is intriguing:

*“But after the disciples had gathered round him, he got up and went back into the city.”*

“Gathered around him – he got up”. Had Paul actually died? Was this a miracle?

It was the disciples, from the city, who came to Paul – some, at least, in the city have believed. (We know Paul revisited his church plant in Lystra on his second and on his third missionary journeys.)

In adversity the Gospel is spread – persecution starting in Pisidian Antioch takes the apostles to Iconium, then to Lystra and to Derbe. Is there encouragement for us in this historical record?

We live in times when the Christian message is primarily ignored - at times, or in countries, actively opposed.

Do we believe that the Spirit will find a way through the apparent maze around us? – do we believe the words of Arthur Ainger

“God is working His purpose out, as year succeeds to year” ?

Jesus has fed the five thousand. He has told them of the *‘bread of life’* and that *‘He is the bread come down from heaven’*.

In today’s Gospel reading we find the crowd grumbling – they know His background, they have watched Him grow up, they know His father and mother. How can He say *“I came down from heaven”*?

Jesus tells them to stop grumbling, and further speaks the words which were the basis for the concluding hymn last week:

*‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.’*

It is the grumbling of the crowd, those who will not or cannot believe, that confronted Barnabas and Paul in Antioch, in Iconium and in Lystra.

For us Jesus is *“the living bread ..... which anyone may eat and not die.”*

We are reminded in verse 51:

*“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live for ever.*

***This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”***

of a future event in the life of Jesus; when he breaks the bread and pours the wine at the ‘Last Supper’.

Bread and wine are symbols, the reality is that Jesus died for each one of us – He gave His life, shed His blood, that we could have a close relationship with Him and with His Father.

Break thou the bread of life’  
O Lord, to me’  
As thou didst break the loaves  
Beside the sea.  
Beyond the sacred page  
I seek thee, Lord;  
My spirit longs for thee,  
O living Word!

Thou art the Bread of Life,  
O Lord, to me,  
Thy holy word the truth  
That saveth me;  
Give me to eat and live  
With thee above;  
Teach me to love thy truth,  
For thou art love.

O send thy Spirit, Lord,  
Now unto e,  
That he may touch my eyes,  
And make me see;  
Show me thy truth concealed  
Within thy word,  
And in thy book revealed  
I see the Lord.

v.1                    Mary Artemisia Lathbury  
vv. 2 and 3        Alexander Groves