

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

Lectionary Readings: 1 Kings 1: (1-14), 15-40
Psalm 89: 19-29, (30-37)
Revelation 1: 4-18
Luke 9: 1-6

Over the past ten days or so we have all avidly followed (or deliberately avoided) the political ‘shenanigans’ in the USA. Today’s Old Testament reading illustrates that this desire to obtain or retain power and authority is nothing new!

The Biblical and Historical record of King David is no exception. He ignores the instruction in Deuteronomy to limit the number of his wives – while reigning in Hebron for 7½ years he ‘acquires’ seven; Michal (daughter of Saul), Abigail (widow of Nabal the Carmelite), Ahinoam of Jezreel, Maacah (daughter of Talmi, King of Geshur), Haggith, Abital and Eclah!

Trouble started with the sons. We remember that Michal despised David for dancing before the Ark of the Covenant as it was brought to Jerusalem and never had children of her own. The first born son was Amnon, his mother Ahinoam. The second born son, to Abigail, was Kileab (Chileab). There is no reference to his later life, leading to the theory that he died young. The third born son (to Maacah) was Absalom – David and Maacah also had a ‘beautiful’ daughter named Tamar. Adonijah – prominent in our reading today is the fourth son of David (mother, Haggith).

What are the intrigues and dissensions? Amnon ‘fancies’ and rapes his half sister Tamar; Absalom her full brother seeks revenge and assassinates Amnon. He later rebels against his father (did he have an ‘inkling’ of the prophecy regarding Solomon?) and gains so much support that David is forced to flee. He did however manage to leave behind a ‘faithful servant’, masquerading as a follower of Absalom, who was able to persuade the latter of a way to defeat David.

It was a trap – Absalom’s force was overcome and the fleeing son was caught by the head in a tree where he was found and murdered; against the specific orders of King David.

That leaves Adonijah as the eldest surviving son and another revolt commences. By this time David is very elderly (1 Kings 1):

When King David was very old, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. ² So his attendants said to him, ‘Let us look for a young virgin to serve the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm.’

³ Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful young woman and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. ⁴ The woman was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no sexual relations with her.

Adonijah gains the support of some from his father’s leaders but others; including Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet remain faithful to David. It is Nathan, who brings to Bathsheba the news that Adonijah has set himself up as king. Bathsheba was wife number eight for David – one of those he married after establishing his reign in Jerusalem.

We have previously commented on the promised succession for David’s line – Solomon is the second son for Bathsheba and David; the son conceived in the infamous ‘one night stand’ died in infancy. Remember – David was complicit in the murder of Uriah (Bathsheba’s husband), to get him out of the way and leave the ‘coast clear’ for David to marry the widow.

2 Samuel 11: 26-27 records:

²⁶ When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. **But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.**

It was Nathan the prophet who, in the next chapter of 2 Samuel, confronts David and foretells calamity for him and his ‘House’.

⁷.....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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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.”

Despite, what to us is a serious crime, David maintains his trust in the Lord and the Lord is faithful to him, if not to all of his children and their successors.

In the ‘optional’ section of today’s reading it is Nathan the prophet who comes to Bathsheba with the news that Adonijah had gone just outside the city of Jerusalem together with his brothers and some royal officials; offered sacrifices and declared himself king. Nathan outlines a plan for Bathsheba to go into King David; to remind him of an oath to her that Solomon would be the next king and to tell him of Adonijah’s action. The prophet then makes a timed entry into the king’s presence and reinforces the message David has learned from Bathsheba.

Is there any Biblical confirmation that David has declared Solomon to be his successor? We find there is a promise of succession for one of his sons but no recorded prophecy that Solomon will be the one. Nathan is again involved and it is recorded in 1 Chronicles 17:

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.'

² Nathan replied to David, 'Whatever you have in mind, do it, for God is with you.'

³ But that night the word of God came to Nathan, saying:

⁴ '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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders^{pl} whom I commanded to shepherd my people, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"

⁷ 'Now then, tell my servant David, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁸ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name like the names of the greatest men on earth. ⁹ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning ¹⁰ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also subdue all your enemies.

"I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: ¹¹ when your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹² He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne for ever. ¹³ I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. ¹⁴ I will set him over my house and my kingdom for ever; his throne will be established for ever."

¹⁵ Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

In 1 Chronicles 28 we find David informing the country's leaders of his original desire to build a Temple and the Lord's command:

David summoned all the officials of Israel to assemble at Jerusalem: the officers over the tribes, the commanders of the divisions in the service of the king, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of all the property and livestock belonging to the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the warriors and all the brave fighting men.

² King David rose to his feet and said:

'Listen to me, my fellow Israelites, my people. I had it in my heart to build a house as a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God, and I made plans to build it. ³ But God said to me, "You are not to build a house for my Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood."

⁴ 'Yet the LORD, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be king over Israel for ever. He chose Judah as leader, and from the tribe of Judah he chose my family, and from my father's sons he was pleased to make me king over all Israel. ⁵ Of all my sons – and the LORD has given me many – **he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel.** ⁶ He said to me, "Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. ⁷ I will establish his kingdom for ever if he is unswerving in carrying out my commands and laws, as is being done at this time."

⁸ 'So now I charge you in the sight of all Israel and of the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God: be careful to follow all the commands of the LORD your God, that you may possess this good land and pass it on as an inheritance to your descendants for ever.

⁹ 'And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you for ever. ¹⁰ Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.'

¹¹ Then David gave his son Solomon the plans.....

There is then a public promise, not perhaps the confidential oath to Bathsheba that we might have been expecting. From verse 28 on in our reading, David reaffirms the 'declared oath' to Bathsheba that Solomon is to be the next king, and further, he instructs Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada (leading the Kerethites and Pelethites) to take Solomon to Gihon and anoint him as king.

Why take him to Gihon? It sounds as though they set out on a significant journey but scholars tell us that the Gihon ('Gushing') Spring was the only reliable source of water and if it had not been there Jerusalem would never have been built. The Canaanites when constructing the city included a tunnel, later named after them, to irrigate the Kidron Valley. (A second tunnel built later in the time of King Hezekiah took water from Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam). Solomon was anointed at Gihon as there was symbolism illustrated by the Hebrew name – "to gush" or "to burst forth" and also a place chosen as it was close to the site of The Tabernacle - it was from here that Zadok took the horn of oil to anoint Solomon.

Adonijah offers sacrifices but he is not anointed as king – Solomon does not offer sacrifices at this time but receives the blessing of his father and of the Lord as he is anointed with oil from the "sacred tent" (NIV).

The lives of David, Solomon and his other sons illustrate two things. Sin can be forgiven for those who put their complete trust in the Lord but the consequences of sin, in human terms, can not necessarily be eliminated.

In contrast to the complexity of the reading from 1 Kings, the Psalm is straightforward! Ethan was probably one of the (Levite?) musicians appointed by David to lead worship. Psalm 89 clearly shows he was an accomplished ‘song-writer’; a further reference to him in 1 Kings 4 records his wisdom and makes a link with our previous reading today:

²⁹ **God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight**, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰ Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ **He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite** – wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.

Verses 19-29 declare the Lord’s relationship with David – he, like Solomon, has been anointed with sacred oil and will be supported and sustained. The promises to David regarding his ‘house’ are seen again as well as a warning for his sons if they turn from the Lord :

²⁷ And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

²⁸ I will maintain my love to him for ever, and my covenant with him will never fail.

²⁹ I will establish his line for ever, his throne as long as the heavens endure.

³⁰ *‘If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes,*

³¹ *if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands,*

³² *I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging;*

³³ but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.

³⁴ I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered.

³⁵ Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness – and I will not lie to David –

³⁶ that his line will continue for ever and his throne endure before me like the sun;

³⁷ it will be established for ever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky.’

There is here a reminiscence of the message Nathan brought to David when confronting him over Bathsheba.

That promise, to David, continues of course to Jesus. Matthew, at the beginning of his Gospel, gives the genealogy of Jesus – from Abraham, through David to Joseph. There were, he says, fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Exile in Babylon and fourteen from after the Exile to Jesus. Most references are to father and son; there are only five women included in the list. The first three are Tamar, the wife of Judah; Rahab, the mother of Boaz; Ruth, the wife of Boaz and grandmother of David.

The entry relating to David and Solomon is interesting – Matthew writes “*David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife*”. Bathsheba is not named but she is known for having been Uriah’s wife centuries later – the consequences of sin cannot be eliminated.

The final female in the list is of course Mary (verse 16 of chapter 1): “*and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*”.

We remember that when the Magi were nearing the end of their journey they assumed that a new born king would be found in a palace and so go to King Herod for information. He consults the chief priests and teachers of the law. They knew or searched for the 700 year old prophecy of Micah:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

⁵ ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶ **“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.**

The lineage promised to King David takes us to Jesus and his eternal throne. The third reading this week comes from the beginning of Revelation – it has John’s initial vision of Christ; “*someone like a son of man*”; later in his Vision “Christ the Lamb” is at the centre of the throne receiving the adoration of the host of heaven.

Are there particular moments or events in your life when you can say “I know exactly where I was and what I was doing?” I can remember the headmaster of my junior school coming into our classroom one morning in February 1952 to make the announcement that King George VI had died. The next year I was still in bed on Coronation morning when my mother came to tell me that Everest had been climbed.

Many years later, on a Friday evening, I was in the ‘office’ of Moss Side Baptist Church in Manchester (the BB Company I had joined in my student days had moved there from a Methodist Church) when one of the other officers arrived and brought the news of the assassination of JFK in Dallas.

John’s Vision was clearly one of these ‘photographic’ events that stay in the memory. He knew where he was – on the island of Patmos; he knew the day of the week – “*On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit*”; he remembered and was able to write down what he had been shown.

The three verses before our reading have a heading – The Prologue:

The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

In his greeting, John refers to the seven churches in the province of Asia. A note in the NIV Study Bible tells us these were located about 50 miles apart and formed a clockwise circle moving north from Ephesus. It is surmised that they were possibly postal centres each serving a different geographical area.

We may have noticed in the reading that seven is a prominent number. One commentator has written:

The number seven is the most prominent number throughout the whole Bible. The word “seven” (or derivatives such as “seventh”, “seventy”, etc.) appears in the Bible 562 times. The book of the Bible that uses the word “seven” most frequently is Revelation, where it appears 55 times. One cannot read Revelation without being struck by the heavy repetition of seven. There are seven churches, seven lampstands, seven stars and a seven-fold spirit — and that’s just the first chapter! Later there are seven messages to the churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven thunders, seven heads, and seven mountains, among others.

Another commentator tells us that “seven is “the number of completeness, of perfection, and of dispensational fullness”.

Two pairs of verses stand out to me in this reading, the first is:

⁵.....to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

We are freed from our sins (but not always their consequences) by the death of Jesus on the Cross.
We are called to serve.

The second Pair:

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

The first reaction on seeing the Lord is to “fall at his feet, as though dead”.

It is then HIS hand that raises us up and gives us encouragement, confidence, trust and faith.

Our Gospel reading today is a short, straight forward, yet challenging passage from Luke – “Jesus sending out the Twelve”. We could argue that they were specially chosen; that times and situations were different then to today; what Jesus said to His disciples cannot apply to us. What does this passage have to say today?

Jesus gave power and authority to his disciples - He still provides power and authority today to those who turn to Him.
They were told to take nothing for the journey.
There are, today, some Christians in ‘ministries’ that do rely on the Lord to provide ALL of their needs.
They are generally supported by other Christians who are in regular jobs etc.
It is this second group, the majority of the Christian community, who enable the first group to operate.

How then can the majority of us interpret the instruction to “Take nothing for the journey”?

The fundamental question - what is central to us? – is it a comfortable existence, having material possessions or living faithfully with just what we need?

*“My God will meet all your **needs** according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 19)*
All your needs, not all your wants.

God’s Spirit is in my heart;
He has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do -
What I have to do:
*He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
Tell blind people that they can see,
And set the down-trodden free,
And go tell everyone
The news that the kingdom of God has come;
And go tell everyone
The news that God’s kingdom has come.*

Just as the Father sent me,
So I’m sending you out to be
My witness throughout the world -
The whole of the world:

Don’t carry a load in your pack;
You don’t need two shirts on your back;
A workman can earn his own keep -
Can earn his own keep:

Don’t worry what you have to say;
Don’t worry, because on that day
God’s Spirit will speak in your heart -
Will speak in your heart:

Alan T. Dale

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