

## Some thoughts on the Lectionary Readings for Year A – *Sunday before Advent* (2<sup>nd</sup> Service)

**Lectionary Readings: 2 Samuel 23: 1-7 *or* 1 Maccabees 2: 15-29**

**Psalm 93**

**Matthew 28: 16-20**

This week we come to the final Lectionary Readings for Year A – Advent Sunday is the beginning of a ‘new’ Church Year in terms of the ‘set’ readings - Year B.

Over the past few weeks Old Testament readings have involved King David; David and the succession of King Solomon; the rebellion against David by other of his sons. We have read how David trusted and relied on the Lord throughout his life - the promise made to him that his line would last forever – provided his sons walked in the ways of the Lord, which so many of them did not. Even Solomon; renowned for wisdom early in his reign and commissioned, by the Lord, to build the Temple his father had planned; was influenced in later years by his many foreign wives to stray from the Lord.

The reading today, from 2 Samuel, brings us to the end of the Biblical record of David’s life – to the writing down of his last words. Their origin and importance are declared in verse 1:

The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse, the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, the hero of Israel’s songs

“The inspired utterance of David” – David himself commenced in his last words:

‘The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.

The Lord has spoken to David about the way a ruler should behave towards his people; in addition, we know from previous readings that He has made promises to David concerning the future of the king’s dynasty. Verse 5 does, however, appear to reveal a little uncertainty in the mind of David:

‘If my house were not right with God, surely he would not have made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part; surely he would not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire.

This verse starts, in the Authorised version:

Although my house *be* not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant .....

The Evangelical Heritage Version has this translation:

But my house is not like this with God. Nevertheless, he has made an everlasting covenant with me.....

I have running through my head the phrase – “Surely my house is right with God?” – I can’t find its origin in any other translation. Perhaps it was a sermon title? – (Have just found it!!! - during my year in Australia I preached, from the Uniting Church Lectionary, on the theme “Is not my house right with God”).

That was the question I was going to ask, anyway, from this verse. “Am I; is my house right with God?” It is a question for each one of us.

The question arises from an Old Testament understanding of God and His relationship with us. Paul writing to the Romans gives us a clear picture of New Testament teaching: (Romans 8)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you<sup>1</sup> free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,<sup>2</sup> God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.<sup>1</sup> And so he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

<sup>14</sup>For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. <sup>15</sup>The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.<sup>14</sup> And by him we cry, ‘*Abba*,<sup>15</sup> Father.’ <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. <sup>17</sup>Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

NOTE: The question remains, in a different form – “Are we led by the Spirit of God?” – Let us pray that we are and that we have assurance of our adoption into His family.

An alternative reading was possible – from the Apocrypha. Mattathias was a Jewish priest, serving regularly in the Temple but around 167BC he returned to his town of Modein. At this time Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Greek Seleucian emperor declared that sacrifices were to be made to the Greek gods. When king’s officers, enforcing this decree, came to Modein they encountered opposition from Mattathias and his sons.

We read, in verse 23, that one Jew came forward to offer the required sacrifice – in anger Mattathias ran forward, killed him, then killed the senior king’s officer. An edict, for his arrest, was issued and as a result, he, his sons and followers from Modein fled to the hills where they led the Maccabean Revolt.

Perhaps the best known son of Mattathias is Judas Maccabeus – celebrated in works such as Handel’s Oratorio of the same name -a guerrilla leader who opposed the Seleucians and upheld the Jewish religion.

The events of the war of the Maccabees form the basis for the holiday of Hanukkah (the festival of lights) – which celebrates the rededication of the second Temple at the time of the Maccabean Revolt. It is celebrated by Jews on the 25th of Kislev (on the Hebrew calendar, corresponding to mid-November to late December (10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2020) in the Gregorian calendar).

Today's reading from the Psalms is short when compared with some recent examples. One commentary has given a title to Psalm 93 – "The Lord Reigns Gloriously". It then comments that the Psalm belongs to a group of Psalms (47; 93-100) that affirm the Lord's rule over the earth.

A footnote in the NIV Study Bible introduces the Psalm as "A hymn to the eternal, universal and invincible reign of the Lord, a theme it shares with the other Psalms already mentioned". It goes on to say that "Together they offer a majestic confession of faith in and hope for the kingdom of God on earth. These hymns were composed for the liturgy of a high religious festival in which the kingship of the Lord – over the cosmic order, over the nations and in a special sense over Israel – was annually celebrated".

There are three distinct parts to the Psalm. Verses 1 and 2 declare the Lord's majesty and strength, His long established, indeed eternal, throne. The second stanza (verses 3&4) compares, unfavourably, the power and might of the sea with that of the Lord – "He is mighty". Verse 5 brings a conclusion:

Your statutes, LORD, stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days.

"The Message" gives the following paraphrase for this verse:

What you say goes—it always has. "Beauty" and "Holy" mark your palace rule, GOD, to the very end of time.

Daniel C. Stradwick writes in his 'modern' song:

*The Lord reigns, the Lord reigns,  
The Lord reigns,  
Let the earth rejoice, let the earth rejoice.  
Let the people be glad  
That our God reigns.*

A fire goes before Him  
And burns up all His enemies;  
The hills melt like wax  
At the presence of the Lord,  
At the presence of the Lord.

The heavens declare His righteousness  
The peoples see His glory;  
For You, O Lord, are exalted  
Over all the earth  
Over all the earth.

Our Gospel reading from Matthew after the Resurrection tells of the eleven remaining disciples going to a mountain in Galilee where they meet the risen Jesus. We read that "they worshipped Him; but some doubted" – I wonder if there is encouragement for us that some of the close knit band who have spent endless time with Jesus during His teaching ministry should display some uncertainty.

It didn't appear to last – Jesus declares the authority that has been given to Him and then delivers the "Great Commission" to the disciples:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'**

That promise and that commission rest on us today.

Hugh Sherlock writes in his hymn:

Lord, Thy church on earth is seeking  
Thy renewal from above;  
Teach us all the art of speaking  
With the accent of thy love.  
We would heed the great commission:  
Go ye into every place -  
Preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,  
Serve with love and share my grace.

Freedom give to those in bondage,  
Lift the burdens caused by sin.  
Give new hope, new strength and courage,  
Grant release from fears within:  
Light for darkness; joy for sorrow;  
Love for hatred; peace for strife.  
These and countless blessings follow  
As the Spirit gives new life.

In the streets of every city  
Where the bruised and lonely dwell,  
Let us show the Saviour's pity,  
Let us of his mercy tell.  
In all lands and with all races  
Let us serve, and seek to bring  
All the world to render praises,  
Christ, to thee, Redeemer, King.

You might also like to do an internet search for another (under copyright) hymn based on Matthew 28: 18-19.

The first line of this hymn, written by Jeffrey Rowthorn – a Welshman, ordained into the Church of England who later emigrated from this country to the USA – reads: "*Lord, you give the great commission*".

Like the hymn by Hugh Sherlock it is set to the tune "Abbot's Leigh" by Cyril Taylor.

**Article by Eric Brown**