

Lectionary Readings: Joshua 14: 6-14
Psalms 141
Matthew 12: 1-21

The People of God have, at last, crossed the River Jordan and are in the Promised Land; Joshua is their established leader; they have overcome and destroyed the city of Jericho – probably the ‘hub’ of Canaanite worship.

Many years pass with further conquests in the Promised Land. At the beginning of Joshua chapter 13 we read: (remember - the crossing of the Jordan is recorded in chapter 4 and the Fall of Jericho in chapter 6)

¹When Joshua had grown old, the LORD said to him, ‘You are now very old, and there are still very large areas of land to be taken over.

²This is the land that remains: all the regions of the Philistines and Geshurites, ³from the River Shihor on the east of Egypt to the territory of Ekron on the north, all of it counted as Canaanite though held by the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron; the territory of the Avvites ⁴on the south; all the land of the Canaanites, from Arah of the Sidonians as far as Aphek and the border of the Amorites; ⁵the area of Byblos; and all Lebanon to the east, from Baal Gad below Mount Hermon to Lebo Hamath.

⁶‘As for all the inhabitants of the mountain regions from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, that is, all the Sidonians, I myself will drive them out before the Israelites. **Be sure to allocate this land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have instructed you, ⁷and divide it as an inheritance among the nine tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh.**’

The remainder of this chapter and the beginning of the next deals with “Division of the Land, East and West of the Jordan” It is at this point that the people of Judah come to Joshua and Caleb speaks to him:

⁶Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, ‘You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me.

⁷**I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land.** And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, ⁸but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people sink. (*Hebrew word is melt*) I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.

⁹So on that day Moses swore to me, “The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children for ever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly.”

¹⁰**Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses,** while Israel moved about in the wilderness.
So here I am today, eighty-five years old!

¹¹I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.

¹²Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.’

¹³Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance.

¹⁴So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

The promise made to Caleb, by the Lord, through Moses is recorded in Deuteronomy. The twelve spies have been sent into Canaan and on their return ten of them adopt a defeatist attitude and persuade the Israelite people that they should not attempt to enter the Promised Land. Only Caleb and Joshua held a contrary view. In Deuteronomy 1: 34-40 we read:

³⁴When the LORD heard what you said, he was angry and solemnly swore:

³⁵‘No one from this evil generation shall see the good land I swore to give your ancestors, ³⁶**except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he set his feet on, because he followed the LORD wholeheartedly.**’

³⁷Because of you the LORD became angry with me also (*that is Moses*) and said, ‘You shall not enter it, either.

³⁸**But your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will enter it.**

Encourage him, because he will lead Israel to inherit it.

³⁹And the little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad – they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it.

⁴⁰But as for you, turn round and set out towards the desert along the route to the Red Sea.

As has been commented before, this was the start of many years wandering in the wilderness – until all of the ‘older’ and rebellious Israelites had passed away.

The passage clearly shows us the benefits of trusting and obeying the Lord through the good times but also through times of adversity. It also shows us the fate of those who turn from the Lord, who put their trust in everyday human desires and devices.

Psalm 141, a psalm of David, is once again, as the NIV Study Bible tells us:

A prayer for deliverance from the wicked and their evil ways. The stanza structure of the first half (two Hebrew lines plus three lines) is repeated in the second half, while at the centre (v.5) a couplet develops a complementary theme.

v.5 is the centre of the poem. “*Let a righteous man strike me*”. The disciplining blows and rebukes of the righteous are the true “kindness” (Hebrew – *hesed*, meaning “love” or “acts of authentic friendship”.)

Oil on my head” reminds us of the 23rd psalm where the Lord anoints my head with oil. Such an action was the customary treatment of an honoured guest at a banquet.

“*My head will not refuse it, for my prayer will still be against the deeds of evildoers*”. Perhaps a better translation would be:

“let my head not refuse it (this ‘oil’ from the righteous), for my prayer is still against their (the wicked’s) evil deeds”.

The Matthew Henry Commentary introduction has:

David was in distress when he penned this psalm, pursued, it is most likely, by Saul, that violent man.

Is any distressed? Let him pray; David did so, and had the comfort of it.

I. He prays for God’s favourable acceptance (vv.1&2). II. For his powerful assistance (vv.3&4).

III. That others might be instrumental of good to his soul, as he hoped to be to the souls of others (vv.5&6).

IV. That he and his friends being now brought to the last extremity God would graciously appear for their relief and rescue (vv.7-10).

The mercy and grace of God are as necessary to us as they were to him, and therefore we should be humbly earnest for them in singing this psalm.

The NIV Bible Commentary heads the psalm “**May My Prayer Be Like Incense!**” - quoting verse 2:

¹ I call to you, LORD, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you.

² May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.

Reading the second part of verse 2 I am reminded of a talk entitled “Worship as a Life-style” given by Chris Bowater, the well-known song writer and Worship Leader.

Chris commented that he felt it was incumbent on all Christians to lift their hands in Worship – not all the time; but he did go on to say that he felt we could only genuinely have the choice of NOT raising our hands if raising of hands was something with which we were already familiar.

He described his own experience towards the raising of hands – getting gradually more elevated day by day - reaching the “Oy Vey” position - before finally being able to lift hands above his head.

I think it was the morning after this talk; Chris was leading Worship from the keyboard and we were reflectively singing “There is a Redeemer”. As we came to its conclusion he announced “Here is one for all Methodists present” and seamlessly moved into “And can it be”.

At that point, my arm hit the ceiling!!

As a number of friends commented afterwards – “It would have to be Charles Wesley wouldn’t it - to ‘generate the breakthrough’!

Returning to the NIV Bible Commentary; it describes the spirit of this lament (psalm 141) as resembling that of psalm 140.

In the introduction for this previous psalm the Commentators have written:

The psalmist has been falsely accused and turns to the Lord for deliverance, because he is the righteous Judge.

The psalm exemplifies the spirit of the *individual lament*.

Psalm 141 is divided into four sections:

I. *Prayer for Deliverance* (vv.1-2)

II. *Prayer for Wisdom* (vv.3-5c)

III. *Prayer for Vindication* (vv.5d-7)

IV. *Prayer for Deliverance and Vindication* (vv.8-10)

The concluding verses of the psalm should also become our daily prayer:

⁸ But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign LORD; in you I take refuge – do not give me over to death.

⁹ Keep me safe from the traps set by evildoers, from the snares they have laid for me.

¹⁰ Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety.

The Gospel reading from Matthew finds parallel accounts in Mark and in Luke.

Jesus and his disciples are making their way through a cornfield and the disciples pick some of the ears of corn and begin to eat them (we are told, in Matthew, that they were hungry). The Pharisees have been watching – are they doing anything ‘unlawful’? The laws they are talking about are of course the page on page of petty regulations they have created not the Lord’s Law.

In all three Gospels Jesus reminds them of the occasion David took and ate the ‘consecrated bread’ from the temple, satisfying his and his men’s hunger.

In Matthew's Gospel alone we have a continuation concerning the priest on Sabbath duty:

⁵ Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent?

⁶ I tell you that something greater than the temple is here.

⁷ If you had known what these words mean, "***I desire mercy, not sacrifice,***" (***Hosea 6:6***) you would not have condemned the innocent.

⁸ **For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.'**

Perhaps the best known saying of Jesus coming out of this account is found in Mark (chapter 2):

²⁷ Then he said to them, "**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**

²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'

Moving on from this incident we read in Matthew "*Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue and a man with a shrivelled hand was there*".

Mark, having recorded the saying in verse 27 above, goes on to say "*Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there*".

Luke, like Mark, refers to a separate incident – "*On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, a man was there whose right hand was shrivelled*".

In all three Gospels, the authorities are again lurking and watching.

In Mark, Jesus has the man stand in front of the congregation, then asks a question of them.

⁴ Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?'
But they remained silent.

In Luke it is similar:

⁷ The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

⁸ But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shrivelled hand, 'Get up and stand in front of everyone.' So he got up and stood there.

⁹ Then Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?'

It is only in Matthew that Jesus, having asked "*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*" goes on to suggest that those accusing him would be only too prepared to rescue a valuable animal that had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath – they would be doing work and breaking their 'laws'.

He goes on to say:

¹² **How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'**

In all three Gospels the man is healed and the Pharisees / Teachers of the law begin to ask what 'they might do to Jesus' – in Matthew and Mark they were even discussing how they might kill him

Only Matthew continues with "**God's chosen servant**":

¹⁵ Aware of this (*the plotting of the Pharisees*), Jesus withdrew from that place.
A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill.

¹⁶ He warned them not to tell others about him.

¹⁷ This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: (Isaiah 42: 1-4)

¹⁸ *'Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight;*

I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.

¹⁹ *He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets.*

²⁰ ***A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.***

²¹ ***In his name the nations will put their hope.'***

Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
though many have come in your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
touched by the madness and lies.

*Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
pour out your Spirit we pray,
Come, Lord Jesus, come, Lord Jesus,
pour out your Spirit on us today.*

May now your Church rise with power and love,
this glorious gospel proclaim.
In every nation salvation will come
to those who believe in your name.
Help us bring light to this world
that we might speed your return.

Great celebrations on that final day
when out of the heavens you come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end,
and rulers will bow at your throne.
Our great commission complete,
then face to face we shall meet.