
Sunday 18th July – Seventh Sunday after Trinity
Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a & Mark 6:30-34, 53-end

2 Samuel 7:1-14a

God's promise to David

After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, 'Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.'

Nathan replied to the king, 'Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.'

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

'Go and tell my servant David, "This is what the LORD says: are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"

'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. 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 great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 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 shall not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

"The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: 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. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 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.

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

David's prayer

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said:

‘Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant – and this decree, Sovereign LORD, is for a mere human!

Mark 6:30-34, 53-end

Jesus feeds the five thousand

The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognised Jesus. They ran throughout that whole region and carried those who were ill on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went – into villages, towns or countryside – they placed those who were ill in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Reflection

Today's reading reminds us that our bright ideas might not be GOD's idea. In 2 Samuel 7, David has become king; his enemies have been defeated and he has finished building a new palace. With time on his hands, David thinks about his next project. As he looks around, he remembers the Ark of the Covenant, which he brought into the city, and is housed in a tent. The more David thinks about this, the more this feels wrong; so he calls the prophet Nathan. "I am living in a palace of cedar, while the Ark of God remains in a tent."

It's more of a statement than a question; as if David is "thinking aloud," rather than asking Nathan for advice. As if he has already decided what to do and is seeking Nathan's approval; instead of asking Nathan, if his plan has GOD'S approval! After all, what could be wrong with such a generous gesture? Surely God would be pleased! At face value it also looked good to Nathan, who was quick to agree. As it turned out, a little TOO quick! "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you." Nathan was on shaky ground, using God's name to validate his answer. The text makes no mention of him actually consulting God... Later that night, Nathan received a detailed revelation from God which corrected this mistake! God didn't want DAVID to build him a house! Instead, GOD wanted to build a house THROUGH DAVID, that would bless the whole world! (Remember, God's "best" is always far better than anything we can dream up!)

In the film Crocodile Dundee, the lead character is walking in Downtown New York when a group of thugs emerge from the shadows. One of them brandishes a knife and tells Dundee to hand over his valuables. Dundee calmly replies, "That's not a knife – THIS is a knife!" as he pulls out a blade that makes his attacker's weapon look like a penknife. It's the same with David's big plan. It's as if God is laughing; "That's not a house! THIS is a house!" God gently, but firmly, reminds David that he, God, is in control.

In verses 1 and 3, David is called "King". But in verses 5 and 8, God tells Nathan, "Go and tell my SERVANT David." Had David become a bit too big for his boots? God reminds David that he may look great in the eyes of his people and the nations around him, but where God is concerned, David is his servant. And a servant doesn't tell his master what to do – it's the other way round! God also reminds David of his humble beginnings! "You were following the flock when I took you from the pasture to lead my people!" But it was GOD who turned David into a leader; who was

with him wherever he went; who cut off David's enemies from before him. And God now promises David, "I will make your name great and provide a place for your people!" This is a reminder to David, and to us, not to magnify our own talents, but to stay humble and dependant on God.

David may have been disappointed when God rejected his idea. When David heard Nathan's prophecy, he could never have imagined how God would bring it to fulfilment, never imagined the scope of God's salvation history. David would have assumed God's promise was just for the people of Israel. Instead, because of Jesus, our perfect Shepherd King, we too are numbered among the people of God. And God's promise extends into eternity. "Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall be established for ever."

Nathan's prophecy reminds me, that God's ideas are always "bigger" and "better" than mine. Nathan's prophecy reminds me, never to limit God! (Which I do, every time I choose my plans over his...) Nathan's prophecy reminds me, that it is always a good idea to listen to God BEFORE I say or do anything! Nathan's prophecy reminds me, God uses ordinary flawed people to fulfil his plans. David was not a perfect king. And Nathan got it wrong when he spoke out without thinking (I love that man!) But he was obedient to God's voice the second time around. Nathan's prophecy reminds me, not to give up when I make a mistake, but to learn from it, so that I can get it right the next time. Above all, Nathan's prophecy reminds me, that God is sovereign. Nothing can thwart his plans.

Amen.

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