



Parish Communion on the 8th Sunday after Trinity, 21/07/2024

2 Samuel 7:1-14. Ephesians 2:11-22. Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, dear Lord. Amen

Temples and tents, crowds and solitude, the sick and the well, gentiles and the commonwealth of Israel - there seem to be a lot of contrasts in our readings this morning, things that don't sit together. It doesn't really sound like the kingdom of God, or does it?

Let's start off with David who we find enjoying a rest from the chaos which defined the start of his kingship story. All the enemies who have plagued him and Israel seem to be sorted out. His kingdom is finally secure. David is no longer scurrying about the desert, hiding in caves in order to escape Saul and other enemies but is established as King, a divinely appointed King who enjoys the Lord's favour. And, instead of leading a nomadic life in a tent, he's settled in a house. And not any house either. David's house is magnificently constructed of cedar – a long-lasting hard wood which has a delicious smell - a seriously grand house, a palace really which is fit for the King of God's chosen people as they inhabit God's chosen land. David has quite literally settled down and the people of the kingdom now know where he is and so can find him if and when they wish to. But the ark of the covenant – which contains the presence of God and is the centre of God's living presence in Israel – is still housed in a tent – it has no fixed home. And so David suggests that the Ark also requires a house, a temple really, to house it. It's easy to follow David's thinking here – it's not right that he, the king, should be more grandly housed than God himself. Their current housing arrangements suggest that David is more important and more permanent than the creator of everything. Not good. So, David consults the prophet, Nathan, about whether the situation should be altered. And, initially, Nathan agrees with him because, as he says, 'the Lord is with you'. In other words, I'm sure you know what you're doing.

But that really isn't the case and God, speaking through Nathan, has a very different view of the matter. God reminds Nathan and David that it is he, God, who is responsible for David's success and prosperity and the peace that the people of Israel enjoy. If there is any building to be done then he, God, will be doing it, not David. God really isn't interested in physical houses however grand and lovely.

Oh. That's a very different way of looking at a situation and begs the question what is God interested in?

Our gospel reading is, I think, helpful here as we see God, in the person of Jesus, being interested in people, ordinary people and their ordinary lives, that's us! Mark tells us about Jesus encouraging his friends, who have had an exhausting time, to 'rest a while'. In fact, he takes them off to have some peace and quiet. He has noticed how they feel and does something about it. Rest is required and rest is offered. I think that this applies to us too. I don't know about you, but I am not good at knowing when to stop and am likely to drive myself on thinking 'I'll just...' And it's never a good idea. But here is a very different approach. Here is the idea that sitting down for a bit with that mug or glass or something is good! It's not a waste of time to step aside so that we can think, reflect, recover or simply recharge. Stopping isn't self-indulgent or weak, it's actually necessary. It is A Good Thing. So, I will be telling myself this the next time that I have an attack of 'I'll Just' and will be reminding myself that I don't need to feel guilty about stopping for a while! Do try it too.

Oh, that's a very different way of looking at the situation.

Actually, Jesus is not just interested in his friends in this reading, he is interested in everyone. Mark tells us about the crowds who hurry to meet Jesus; he compares them to 'sheep without a shepherd' and we also learn that Jesus pities their lost state and pauses to do something about it. He seems to have the same level of concern for these unknown crowds as he does for his friends. And he does that not once but twice in today's gospel reading because after taking the disciples off for a much-needed rest Jesus goes ashore to the great crowd which as assemble again and began 'teaching many things'. He gives them what they need. And they don't just need teaching but also need other refreshment, so Jesus feeds them. Bodies are as important as souls to him, which is an interesting thought.

We hear how he and the disciples, now rested, travel to the region on the other side of the lake where there is another crowd waiting and here Jesus heals the sick with his touch. He's still giving people what they need. Being sick in the time of Jesus was terrifying and life threatening. There was no NHS, no sick pay and, even more scarily, a strong chance that you would be cast out from your community simply because your illness was seen as a punishment from God. Frightening indeed. But Jesus didn't see these crowds of ill people in that, to him they were not responsible for their illnesses or whatever. He didn't share the idea that they deserved their fate, that it was something they deserved. Instead, he looks at the heaving mass of humanity crushed onto a lakeside and sees each and every individual for who they are and takes the time to love them all. That's quite a thought.

Jesus had a very different way of looking at a situation.

And finally, let's consider the writer of Ephesians discussing the boundaries we create to divide up humanity – Gentile and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, citizen and refugee, free and slave – all the variations of 'them' and 'us' that we humans create in order to make ourselves feel safe, to reassure ourselves that we belong but they, whoever they are, don't. They, of course, do not deserve to belong. We do. Don't we? Ephesians shows us a very different way of looking at things, it encourages us to see God's viewpoint. It reminds us that the law, that's the law handed to Moses, with its commandments and ordinances, has been abolished. And through the cross we are reconciled into one group – no longer strangers and aliens but citizens and members of the household of God. I don't know about you, but I find the idea that I might be a stranger and an alien a bit of a shaker. Am I really relegated to that class of outsider? It is not a comfortable thought. Fortunately, Jesus has broken down that dividing wall and we are welcomed into God's home, not as visitors who get a brief stay and are sent on their way, but rather as residents. We are allocated our own rooms and encouraged to help ourselves from the fridge! We are told that we belong and are treated as members of the family. We are expected to stay in this particular house for ever. That really is a different way of looking at things.

Before, I finish let's glance back to where we began this morning. Remember David in his magnificent house of cedarwood while the Ark of the Covenant only has a tent to rest in? God wasn't keen on David putting his Ark into a house of cedar. God didn't need it because he didn't have that kind of house in mind for his dwelling place. All that time he was waiting for us – waiting for us to be built together so that we are his dwelling place. As he welcomes us into his house so we become his house. We live in him and he lives in us. So, this week why not welcome God in? Welcome him into the house of your life - he's an excellent guest and doesn't worry about cobwebs or mess, he's seen it all before so cancel your hostess anxiety. In fact, God will give you a hand with clearing out your life in ways that will definitely surprise you.

Now that really is a different way of doing things!

Amen

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