

Sundays between 3 and 9 July, Ordinary 14 Year B

We are now in 'Ordinary Time' again – that time of the Christian Year when (so we might believe) nothing extra-ordinary happens. Is it time for God's summer break? Or ours? In fact it's neither, of course.

Being in Ordinary Time means that we have both Continuous and Related Old Testament readings.

Continuous

2 Sam 5:1-5

Hebron is about 20 miles to the south-west of Jerusalem. It was to this shrine that 'all the tribes of Israel' came and swore their allegiance to David. Interestingly, they acknowledge David's key role in the effective governance of the country since long before Saul's fall. There is no question of David's divine right to succeed Saul on the throne.

The basic facts of David's reign are set out in order to establish his pre-eminence and worthiness. Verse 5 reminds us that for the first few years his rule extended only over the southern tribes, and was based in Hebron. Later David established a new cultic and political centre at Jerusalem, a place which carried no baggage either for the northern group of tribes (who worshipped at Shechem) nor for the southern group (whose centre was here in Hebron). This unification was David stroke of genius. Both factions had to yield something in the interests of unity.

Ps 48

This psalm reflects the awe – not to say terror - with which the nations of the world are struck when they see the grandeur and beauty of the great city which David has founded.

Related

Eze 2: 1-5

This brief passage is in fact a prelude to one of Ezekiel's great 'action parables'. In the following verses the prophet is given a scroll to eat. The words written on it are words of woe. The calling of the prophet is not often to bring good news (but Ezekiel does in the end bring news that speaks wonderfully of encouragement and hope).

Here we are being told of the calling of the prophet in relation to his intended audience. He is charged to deliver the message, and what the audience thinks of it is beside the point. *They will know* that they have heard a word from the Lord.

Ps 123

A striking picture emerges from this psalm as we read it. At the outset it is a matter of humble and reverential adoration, a varied group of servants closely following their master's every move. All this fits into a comfortable framework of harmony and blessedness. And then the tone changes, first subtly then plainly. 'Have mercy on us ... for we have had enough of contempt.' What a remarkable change! Whose contempt is getting them down? What does this have to do with the relationship between master and servant?

Clearly the answer is that the contempt is coming not from God but from another quarter entirely - the arrogant and the proud (verse 5).

This link between the mercy of God and the contempt of the arrogant is indicative of a strong feeling that God must be in charge of everything. The arrogant could not be so tiresomely contemptuous without God's consent.

Epistle 2 Cor 12:2-10

The theme running through today's (Related) readings should now be apparent: it is that of being a victim of oppression - or bullying, or contempt, or whatever form it might take. Here in Paul's autobiographical ruminations we find a story of both exaltation and hardship. The 'thorn in the flesh' with which Paul had to live - so far as we know - for the rest of his life. Whatever it was (and there is little point speculating about it) must have been something that, in Paul's mind, impeded or obstructed his efforts to proclaim the gospel. He had to find a way of fitting this painful facet of experience into his account of himself. So he attributes it directly to God, and discovers reason why God might have allowed him to be so afflicted.

Gospel Mark 6: 1-13

All roads lead to Rome, says the proverb; for Christians, all pathways through the scriptures lead to Jesus. This pathway through undeserved suffering leads us to a startling recognition that not even Jesus' status as the Son of God exempts him from the ill-tempered violence of the lynch-mob - and all because he was 'one of us'. What a sad reflection on human nature, that 'one of us' could not possibly be a person of any significance whatsoever.

But of course Jesus was not deterred. Not for him the retreat into obscurity so he could lick his wounds. Nor, for his followers, the chance to bide their time until the hubbub was over. No indeed! Jesus sends his disciples off to preach repentance on his behalf. They are to expect a cold shoulder from some they visit. They are not to be burdened with excess baggage. They go - and they meet with success.