



ST. LUKE'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Sermon for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, July 2024

No Rest for the Revolutionary

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall, Deacon

https://www.lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Pentecost/BProp11_RCL.html

2 Samuel 7:1-14a, Psalm 89:20-37, Ephesians 2:11-22, Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Today's Collect perfectly prepares us for our lesson from 2 Samuel so I felt compelled to repeat it. God knows what we mortals need before we ask, and God understands that our asking is often misguided. This prayer asks for God's compassion. Our thoughts are not as lofty as God's thoughts. We are mere humans. God is our creator and knows our frailties and foibles. We ask God to give us what we need, not what we deserve, and not because we are worthy to receive gifts from God, but because we ask, "through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord..." May it be so.

First, a bit of background for the Old Testament reading. After the Exodus, the Israelite armies fought for control of what they believed was land given to them by God. Most of the time, they were successful. In ~1050 BCE, the people decided having God on their side was not enough. They wanted a human king to govern, judge and lead armies into war. By acclamation, primarily because of his prowess in battle¹ the people chose Saul to be their first king. Saul and his armies had defeated Israel's enemies on every side: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the kings of Zobah and the Amalekites, and even chased the Philistines back to their own land to fight another day.

The prophet Samuel cautioned the people that choosing a flesh and blood king was a rejection of God as Lord,² and warned them about the loss of personal and tribal freedom that would certainly follow. Finally, in a moment of apparent frustration as real as human parents experience with wayward children, God told Samuel to anoint Saul king over Israel and suffer the consequences of their choices. "All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service."³ just as Samuel had predicted.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saul-king-of-Israel>

² 1 Samuel 8, 10:17-27, and 12

³ 1 Samuel 15:52

Saul struggled with severe melancholy alternating with manic episodes.⁴ Today we might call it PTSD. “The spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit tormented him.” The shepherd boy, David, son of Jesse, came into Saul’s service and “whenever the evil spirit... came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it. Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.”⁵

Then David killed the Philistine giant Goliath. As David became increasingly successful in battle, Saul became progressively resentful and actively plotted to kill David. The rest of that story is even more complicated (and weird)! Saul and his sons died fighting the Philistines and David replaced Saul as king.⁶

In today’s OT lesson the fighting is over and Israel is in God’s good graces. King David is comfortable in his newly constructed cedar house wondering if the ark of God shouldn’t have a “home” better than the tent where it currently resides. The prophet Nathan agrees with David, but “that same night” Nathan learns God has a different idea. God tells Nathan to remind the King of his humble beginnings and Who helped him defeat Israel’s enemies and achieve his current position. What could David possibly give God when everything already belongs to God? God is unimpressed by David’s house and promises David an eternal home and offspring. Jesus, who is called “Son of David” in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts, is the one who will build a community to the glory of God, and it is Jesus who will establish God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven; the kingdom of love, the kingdom of peace, the forever kingdom.

According to the Oxford Annotated Bible, Psalm 89 is a “hymn extolling God’s power and faithfulness, recalling the unalterable covenant God made with ... the Davidic dynasty, that it will stand forever.” We know that David is credited with writing many of the Psalms – but not this one. This psalm was composed by Ethan the Ezrahite, a wise man from the time of, or prior to, King Solomon. Solomon was the second son born to David and Bathsheba. By David’s oath to Bathsheba, Solomon was crowned king when David was very old. It was not a smooth accession.⁷

Two Sundays ago in the Gospel reading from our Revised Common Lectionary [RCL], we learned how Jesus expanded his ministry by sending the apostles [“the sent ones”] 2-by-2 into a dangerous world with Jesus’ own power to cast out demons and heal the sick [Mark 6:7-13]. In today’s Gospel lesson the disciples return, filled with exuberance over their many accomplishments, to tell Jesus how

⁴ <https://www.theseniortimes.com/the-madness-of-king-saul-mental-illness-and-suicide-in-israels-first-king/>

⁵ 1 Samuel 16:1-23

⁶ 1 Chronicles 10:13

⁷ 1 Kings

very effective they have been at their assigned tasks. Jesus must be glad for the disciples' successes.

Jesus suggests a quiet retreat somewhere, but the people in need of healing just keep coming. Jesus and his disciples get into a boat hoping to sail to a deserted beach and escape the mass of humanity, but the crowds must have guessed where that lonely place must be. They hurried ahead and were waiting on the shore when the boat arrived. Like the exemplary preacher and pastor Jesus is, he "had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things."

In Mark's gospel we meet Jesus through his emotions and the actions that he takes. He has "compassion" for the people. Compassion is a bigger emotion than feeling sorry for someone. Compassion is experiencing someone else's pain and sorrow as though it was your own, and doing something about it. Jesus sees people who are oppressed, impoverished, desperate, ailing and he takes action! He sent his disciples to do what before only he could do. Like Jesus, the disciples also have been active; preaching, teaching, and healing bodies, minds and spirit. Also notice that not all of the people who need Jesus' healing arrive on their own. Friends and relatives are bringing those who cannot do for themselves. "They laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed."

Jesus rallied the troops to action. As followers of Jesus we are inspired and empowered by his example to act. How do you know if you are called to action? Two questions: Is your heart beating? Are you breathing? If the answer is yes to at least one of those, you are called. Stay positive, work hard, and Make. It. Happen!

PS: Remember how Mark sandwiches other stories inside the main story? Don't worry about the verses that were omitted from today's gospel reading.⁸ They contain two major events; feeding of the 5000 from 5 blessed and broken loaves of bread and 2 fish,⁹ and a version of Jesus walking on the water. Next week we will hear both stories as they are told in the Gospel according to John.¹⁰

May the power of God surround us, the unconditional love of Jesus enfold us; the fire of the Holy Spirit burn in our hearts and shine forth in our lives. May we, as caring, compassionate, believing followers of Jesus, be fearless in proclaiming our faith, and strong in demanding justice for all. Amen.

⁸ Mark 6:35-53

⁹ with 12 lunchbox-size baskets of leftovers collected afterward – one basket for each disciple's next meal

¹⁰ Matthew 14:13-33 includes Peter trying to walk on water, Mark 6:35-56 no mention of Peter, Luke 9:11-17 Jesus feeds 5000 but doesn't walk on water, John 6:1-21 but no mention of Peter.