

The
Further
Adventures
Of David

July 1st

I Samuel 27 vv 1-12

This is not an incident I'm comfortable with. David realises that he is not safe anywhere in Israelite territory because of Saul's enmity against him. So he takes refuge in one of the Philistine cities. Maybe he asks Achish for a place to live with his men away from the royal court because he knows that Achish is reluctant to trust him. On June 20th we read the story of David's earlier attempt to find safety with the Philistines. Given his own domain in Ziklag, David launches a raid against three other tribes. It could be that this is because he intends to live on the plunder. It might well be that he was being more devious than that. He led Achish to believe that he had attacked his own people and that therefore he had burnt his boats with Israel and therefore had no alternative but to be loyal to the Philistines. He makes sure to kill all the Geshurites, Gezrites and Amalakites so that there are no survivors to tell the Philistines what really happened. Two points. When we judge the terrible things characters in the Bible did when waging war, we have to bear in mind that war is always horrible and that, even after 2,000 years of Christian teaching, we're still prepared to do terrible things – including the use of nuclear weapons. The other is that we have to read the Bible in the Light of Jesus. The question is, If we don't believe that Jesus would approve of what David did in order to defend himself and to secure his position, what would He think about what modern countries like our own are prepared to do in war. *Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.*

July 2nd

I Samuel 28 vv 1&2

Achish makes it clear that he expects David to fight on his side, for the Philistines against Israel. David's answer seems to me to be evasive but Achish takes it as a pledge of David's loyalty to him. This raises some interesting questions about how far we're prepared to enter morally grey areas in order to protect ourselves – makeshift loyalties, deception, betrayal of misplaced trust. David had to survive. He was vital to God's plans for Israel, but his conduct in these verses and in the last chapter is not exactly honourable. Would you be wholly honest if telling the whole truth would put you at risk? Would you pretend to be loyal to an enemy in order to protect yourself? Would it make any difference to your answer if you were lying in a good cause?

July 3rd

I Samuel 28 vv 3-6

I tried to write a book once about Saul. I finished it, but eventually I destroyed it. I had failed to bring out the poignancy of Saul's story. He turned out bad, but he had had so much promise. Basically sincere, he made too many wrong decisions. Unable to realise how much he was loved, he pushed away his friends and even his family. When we first meet him in the Bible, he is a humble man, generous, ready to forgive, obedient to God. When he gets things wrong and angers God, instead of returning to God, he becomes embittered and isolates himself from God's mercy. He resents the fact that everything in his life, his plans and hopes for the future, are collapsing around him, but he hasn't the grace to repent of his errors which would have been the first step towards reconstruction. I think of what Jesus says about the sin against the Holy Ghost being unforgiveable. If we have totally hardened our hearts against God, there is no way back. But I also remember that Jesus said, *with God all things are possible*. So I would never give up hope for myself or for anyone else.

July 4th (Trinity 5)

I Samuel 28 vv 7-10

GRANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Once, when I was at Orpington, some teenagers came round to my house in a bit of a panic. They had been messing about with spiritualism and one girl had terrified herself. Later on, a young man came to see me at Ramsgate, very worried because seventeen years previously a fortune teller had told him that he only had seventeen more years to live. Mostly, all this stuff about Ouija boards, séances, magic spells and fortune telling is deception. Unscrupulous practitioners deceive their clients. Some practitioners unwittingly deceive themselves. Some practitioners are mentally ill. Even though it is mostly false, this kind of stuff can really upset people. It is wrong to deceive whether it's well meant to offer false comfort, eg, to the bereaved, or whether it is a deliberate attempt to exploit the victim's fears or grief for the personal gain of the practitioner. It is foolish to make a game of these things. Mucking about with magic may have regrettable unforeseen consequences. Just very occasionally, as in today's reading, it may be real & that is even more sinister & dangerous.

July 5th

I Samuel 28 vv 11-20

The Witch of Endor was able to bring back the spirit of the prophet Samuel. So it isn't impossible. Neither is it entirely true when people claim that the Old Testament doesn't believe that there is life after death. Note, though, that Samuel is not pleased that his rest is being disturbed. If present day mediums could bring back the spirits of the dead to talk to the living, they wouldn't be doing them any favours. Saul was desperate. If it hadn't been for the fact that everything else had failed, he would never have consulted a medium. (Sometimes it is the desperate unhappiness of bereaved people which leads them to consult mediums today.) In his life, Saul had so far departed from the LORD that the LORD had departed from him & effectively become his enemy. I do believe that, like Judas Iscariot, Saul could have found a way back, but, like Judas, he failed to find it. The news Samuel had to give him was not at all what he wanted to hear. He, his sons, and many of the Israelite army would be joining Samuel on the morrow, the day of the battle. Saul would have done better to turn to God and put his faith in him. While the circumstances of ordinary decent bereaved people today are very different from those of Saul, they would do far better to let go and let God, to turn to God and to trust Him for their loved one's well-being than to turn to spiritualism. Many people in the world today are desperately unhappy because they feel that they have no-one to love them. But God loves all of us. We're much happier if we know that and commend our lives into His loving care.

July 6th

I Samuel 28 vv 21-25

A parishioner at Ramsgate reckoned she would have the words *I can manage* inscribed on my tombstone. Far too often, that is my response to offers of help. Sometimes, it is only at a funeral that you realise just how much a person was loved and admired. More sadly, the deceased himself may not have been aware of how much he was respected in his lifetime. I don't think that is particularly good for us if we are always being told how marvellous we are (especially when we're not being particularly marvellous) but a reasonably restrained and sincere expression of appreciation is not out of place. Some people, however, like Saul push away their friends, reject help and fail to realise how much loved they really are. Never forget that there are people who care about you and, even if you don't feel very loved or lovable at any given time, God loves you always and just as you are.

July 7th

I Samuel 29 vv 1-11

Both David and Achish were in a difficult position. David was now one of Achish's high ranking officers and, as such, he was expected to fight with the Philistines against their enemies. But the enemy they were now fighting were David's own people Israel. What would David have done if he had come to the battle – fight against his own people, the nation God had chosen him to rule over in place of Saul, or betray his new master, the King of Gath, who had given him sanctuary when Saul was trying to kill him? Can we say that it was providential that he didn't finally have to make that choice? The other Philistine leaders insisted that David be sent home. Have you ever been a position in which by doing what you consider to be your duty to one person you let down someone else? Certainly, you or I would pray for guidance in such a case. I think we might be grateful if Providence so arranged it that, as in David's case, circumstances so worked out as to spare us the choice.

July 8th

I Samuel 30 vv 1-31

This is not a chapter we read very often. It's the kind of story you might meet in an adventure book if it weren't in the Bible. The Amalekites take advantage of David and his soldiers being away with the Philistine army to attack David's home at Ziklag. They steal the women and children and take them captive. They burn the city and plunder the farm animals and goods. They've got well away and David doesn't try to pursue them until he has received God's assurance that they can be caught. Even so, it's a gruelling pursuit and a third of his forces drop out. Nevertheless, they meet an Egyptian servant (slave? prisoner?) who has been abandoned by the Amalekites when he fell sick. He guides David to the robbers' camp where the Amalekites are celebrating. He rescues the captives and recovers not only his own property but also what the Amalekites have stolen from other people. This surplus he uses to give presents to his own allies, the people whose support he will need when he returns to Israel to take the crown. They also agree that everyone who takes part in an expedition gets a fair share of the spoils, including those whose best isn't good enough. This is such a good story, quite as good as anything which people pay to see on Netflix. What I wonder is that we don't do more to market the Bible as a good read, rather than regard it as a chore which we only read because we have to.

July 9th

I Samuel 31 vv 1-7

What Samuel had warned would happen came to pass. Saul and three of his sons (including Jonathan) died, the Israelite army was routed and the Philistines took possession of some of their land. Saul chose death over capture and disgrace and, when his armour bearer couldn't bring himself to kill the LORD's anointed, he killed himself. Does it count as suicide if death or worse is imminent? Classically, Christians have always regarded suicide as a sin, self murder, taking what is not really your own life but the gift of life which God has given you. There is however now considerable pressure to change the law so that those who are terminally ill and suffering terribly can be assisted to commit suicide. Compassion seems to demand that the law be so changed, but there are many issues involved and there is no space here in which to go into them all properly. Just let me say that there is a very great danger in compromising the principle that life is sacred. We are of infinite value and are therefore not to be treated as in somebody else's way. We bear one another's burdens and it is OK if we become someone else's burden to bear. We would, I hope, do the same for them. Neither are we to lose hope in God. In the end we do belong to Him, not to ourselves. It's not our life to end as we see fit. People very often (but not always) turn out to be far stronger than ever they would have expected when faced with pain, disability and the indignities which derive from having to rely on others for the basic things which we learnt as children to do for ourselves. It is a fine distinction but an important one between refusing or withholding treatment which might prolong a life which is painfully nearing its end, or taking pain-killing medication which will, as a side effect, hasten death, and actually taking the step of deliberately killing yourself or asking your doctor's or your family's assistance to end it all.

July 10th

I Samuel 31 vv 8-13

In days gone by, the heads of executed criminals or defeated enemies were commonly displayed in such places as London Bridge and Temple Bar. It must have been a gruesome sight as they were left to rot. Not so bad as public executions, I would think, and they drew crowds of thousands. There is something very nasty in human beings – original sin. Displaying the heads was a way of humiliating further the defeated

enemy or the condemned criminal. It was a demonstration of power. It was a warning to other potential rebels, felons or other enemies of the state. So the Philistines made a public exhibition of the remains of Saul and his sons. The Israelites were humiliated. The Philistines were triumphant. What the men of Jabesh-gilead did was brave and honourable on their part. In giving Saul and his sons the best funeral they could, they restored respect to their king & the royal family and effectively defied the Philistines.

July 11th (Trinity 6)

II Samuel 1 vv 1-12

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The attitude we pray for in today's collect is so different from the attitude that would enjoy attending public executions or would display and humiliate the remains of those who had been executed or died in battle. The hateful and savage in us is our original sin. In Christ, our sins are washed away and we are set free to be people of love. But the one impulse wars against the other, the flesh against the spirit, during our lives on earth. And that is why we pray for grace to love more.

It is ironic that it was an Amalekite who brought the news of Saul's death and claimed to have killed him. The Amalekites were always enemies to Israel. It was Saul's failure to deal thoroughly with the Amalekites which finally brought about his own downfall. This Amalekite must have been on the battlefield because he recovered Saul's crown and bracelet. He expected some reward from David for killing David's enemy, but David had himself always refrained from harming the LORD's anointed or killing his friend.

July 12th

II Samuel 1 vv 13-16

It was an Amalekite who claimed to have killed the LORD's anointed. It would surely have been unthinkable for an Israelite. Similarly, it was Doeg the Edomite who killed Ahimelech and the other priests at Nob,

when Saul's Israelite soldiers refused to do so. All human life is sacred, but there has been a feeling that some lives are especially sacred, just as some ground is thought of as especially sacred. It is worse to kill a king or a priest than it is to kill an ordinary person. It is worse to shed blood in a church than it is in any other building. Only a heathen (an Amalekite in this case) would kill the LORD's anointed. My head tells me that our hearts are wrong about this. Every human life is of infinite value and it is as bad to kill a slave as it is to kill a king. It is certainly wrong to shed blood in church, but so it would be to do so anywhere else. But it is a very powerful feeling. Cromwell and the parliamentarians lost a lot of support when they executed King Charles I. They called it regicide and even many of those who thought Charles was unfit to be king thought that killing him was a species of sacrilege. I remember reading a journalist who had to admit that, though a lifelong republican, he experienced something very special when he met the Queen. I don't think that there is the same aura around presidents or prime ministers. What I would say about this is similar to what I would say about Sunday. Sunday is a special day on which we might be especially thoughtful about worship and avoiding even the appearance of sin, but that does not mean that on weekdays we forget about God and wilfully or carelessly fall into sin. The point of keeping the Sabbath holy is to sanctify all time. Similarly, if we particularly reverence certain people, that does not mean that we are free to treat other people with any less respect. We ought to offer the same courtesy to the paperboy as we would to the Queen. Our prayers for the Queen are our prayers for everybody.

O LORD, our heavenly Father, the high and mighty, King of kings, Lord of lords, the only Ruler of princes, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth; Most heartily we beseech thee with thy favour to behold our most gracious Sovereign Lady, Queen *ELIZABETH*; and so replenish her with the grace of thy Holy Spirit, that she may always incline to thy will, and walk in thy way. Endue her plenteously with heavenly gifts; grant her in health and wealth long to live; strengthen her that she may vanquish and overcome all her enemies; and finally, after this life, she may attain everlasting joy and felicity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

July 13th

II Samuel 1 vv 17-27

David completely dissociates himself from Saul's death. He did not desire it. He did not arrange it. He executes the person who claims to have killed Saul. He then makes this extremely beautiful lamentation, proclaiming his love and respect for Saul and Jonathan (especially) and mourning their deaths. V18 is a bit mysterious. The Book of Jasher (or the upright) seems to have been a collection of songs. The "bow" might be the name of the song or it might be that this song was sung at archery practice or it might just be a note that David, as well as composing this lament, ordered that his troops be trained in the use of the bow. Jonathan's love for David is described as *passing the love of women*. There can be a male bonding between close friends, different from romance, but very powerful.

July 14th

II Samuel 2 vv 1-7

With Saul dead and the army vanquished, there was the danger of anarchy. Israel consisted of twelve tribes which had not always worked closely together. Judah, David's tribe, was also always to some extent the odd tribe out. What would happen now? Would the tribes drift apart? Would the Philistines be their overlords? Who was in charge? Human beings need a leader. We need order. But it is difficult to establish an authority which can command general respect – especially given that power tends to corrupt the powerful and that, knowing this, the rest of us tend to be distrustful our rulers. What happened in this case was, that having prayed for guidance, David went to Hebron where the tribe of Judah proclaimed him king. Seeking God's guidance should be the first thing we do when we have difficult decisions to make. Prayer ought always to be our first resort, though it is often our last. One of David's first acts is to commend the men of Jabesh-gilead for the way they had taken care of Saul's body. Everyone can see that David had no desire to see Saul dead. Apart from his personal respect for Saul, rulers do tend to be wary of assassinating other rulers. There is the danger that it will set a precedent. Once you have broken the taboo and killed a head of state because he is your enemy and a tyrant, why wouldn't people who regard you as an enemy and a tyrant do the same thing to you?

July 15th

II Samuel 2 vv 8-11

Abner was Saul's cousin and his commander in chief. He was very loyal to Saul and he seems to have been a good and honourable man. When the people of Judah made David King in Hebron, Abner proclaimed Saul's son Ishbosheth King over the rest of Israel. The name Ishbosheth means "son of shame". He was probably really named Eshbaal, "man of Baal". Baal means *husband* or *lord*, but it was also the name of one of the principal pagan gods. Quite probably, in these early days, the name Baal was thought of simply as meaning Lord and was therefore sometimes used to mean the LORD. Later on, this was regarded as dangerously confused and, when writing about men with Baal in their names, the biblical authors substituted the word for shame. It was certainly shameful to worship the pagan God Baal. This helps to explain Hosea 2¹⁶: *And it shall be in that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi* (my husband, my man); *and thou shalt call me know more Baali* (my husband, my lord.) The Israelites will understand the difference between the LORD and Baal and to which they are married as the Church is the Bride of Christ.

July 16th

II Samuel 2 vv 12-17

Things were tense between Judah and the rest of Israel. David's men and Ishbosheth's men happened to meet at the Pool of Gibeon. What seems to have happened is that a mock battle turned into the real thing and the Israelites were defeated by the Israelites. There are several places in the world today, including India and China and Turkey and Syria, where troops on either side of the border are on a hair trigger and a mistake or a deliberate provocation could result in all out war. As I write, things are very tense between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It is good to hold these places in prayer, even to pray your daily newspaper or whatever you news source may be.

O GOD, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men: that thou wouldest be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, thy saving health unto all nations

This is a prayer for missionary work, but not only for missionary work. It is a prayer for the well being in every respect of people of all nations: peace, justice, health, freedom from want and every blessing you can think of.

July 17th

II Samuel 2 vv 18-32

Asahel was a headstrong young man in pursuit of a reputation as a warrior. He saw his chance and was determined to kill the commander of the opposing force. Abner could probably have killed him straightaway when he Asahel attacked him, but Abner was a wise and honourable man and foresaw the consequences of so doing. The sons of Zeruiah were violent and vengeful men and cousins of King David. So Abner was brave enough to run away, but, when Asahel refused to give up the pursuit, Abner had no alternative but to kill him. It was Abner who was statesman enough to stop the carnage before even more men were killed.

Soldiers of Christ,
arise,
And put your
armour on,
Strong in the
strength which
God supplies
Through His
eternal Son.
Strong in the Lord
of hosts,
And in His mighty
pow'r,
Who in the
strength of Jesus
trusts
Is more than
conqueror.

Stand then in His
great might,
With all His
strength endued,
And take, to arm
you for the fight,
The panoply of
God;
That, having all
things done,
And all your
conflicts passed,
Ye may o'er come
through Christ
alone,
And stand entire
at last.

Leave no
unguarded place,
No weakness of
the soul,
Take every virtue,
every grace,
And fortify the
whole.
From strength to
strength go on,
Wrestle and fight
and pray,
Tread all the
pow'rs of darkness
down
And win the well-
fought day.

July 18th (Trinity 7)

II Samuel 3 vv 1-5

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Increase in us true religion. The Living in Love & Faith process is about discerning how true religion treats matter regarding identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. What is the Christian answer to

questions about same sex relationships, transition between genders, the possibility of divorce, the structure of the family & household? We look to the Bible for teaching on these matters as on all others. It was a very different world, however. We wouldn't want men today to be like David with several wives and concubines and children by different women. We can however discover the principles underlying good relationships through prayerful consideration of the word.

July 19th

II Samuel 3 vv 6-11

Having these women in OT times (as in many times and cultures since) was regarded as a demonstration of the man's power. Where did the women fit into all this? How did they feel? Honoured to be chosen? Humiliated to be treated as chattels? Grateful to be given a life of luxury at court? Resentful at having their freedom taken away? Ishbosheth was a weak king and he depended entirely on Abner for his position. It's not made clear whether Abner had done what Ishbosheth accused him of. He could have. He had the power. I think he probably didn't. He is indignant at the suggestion. It is very hard to find yourself accused of something when you know that you are not guilty and you believe that the people accusing you of wrongdoing should have known you better than to think that you might be. Anyway, despite his loyalty to the house of Saul, now gives up on Ishbosheth and decides to put the kingdom back together and acknowledge David as King of all Israel.

July 20th

II Samuel 3 vv 12-16

Cast your mind back to when David slew Goliath. Part of his reward was supposed to be to marry Saul's daughter Merab, but Saul went off David because people made more of him than they did of Saul. So Merab was given to a man called Adriel. Saul's other daughter Michal really loved David and Saul agreed to let them marry in return for David killing some more Philistines – the enemy. Michal was loyal to David when Saul was trying to kill him. So Saul took her away from David and married her to this Phalti or Phaltiel. David now demands to have Michal back. Phaltiel is apparently devastated. We're not told what Michal thought about it at this point, but, later on we shall see her relationship with David turn sour. It appears that Michal brought up

Merab's sons whose father was Adriel. They and the sons of Rizpah come to a terrible end in chapter 21. It's as confusing as a TV soap! David may have wanted Michal back because he still loved her at this stage. Maybe he was demonstrating that he now had the power to compel Saul's household to give him what he wanted. Maybe it was both. It occurred to me today that we are probably told more about the personal life of David than of any other character in the Bible. He does come over as very human, albeit living in very different times.

July 21st

II Samuel 3 vv 17-27

So Abner met David and they came to an agreement that he would support David as King of all Israel. Abner fixed things in advance with the leading men of Israel. He acknowledged what we have known since Samuel anointed the shepherd boy (I Sam 16), namely that it was God's Will that David should be King of Israel. No doubt Abner would have been given a high position in David's court, probably replacing Joab as commander in chief. Cousins they might be, very useful they were, but the sons of Zeruah were also a big problem for David – violent, vengeful & utterly ruthless. David would probably have liked to become less dependent on them. So Joab's job was at risk from the man he hated as the one who had killed his youngest brother. When Joab found out, he played a dirty trick on Abner and killed him. Does it require ruthlessness to gain & hold power in a state, a business, a family or even a Church? Jesus said that the meek would inherit the earth and, all too often, His words have been mocked. It is tempting to think that the only way to power is to be prepared to forsake principal. You can even argue that you can only run a country (or business or family or Church) well for the benefit of its citizens, workers, customers or members, if you hold power. Since you can't do good without power and since you can't get into power without being prepared to deal ruthlessly with any opposition, an aspiring statesman has to be prepared to do evil in order to do good. I think this was Machiavelli's argument. On the other hand, Joseph Stalin asked, "The Pope! How many divisions has he got?" The Church is still here. Stalin's USSR is not. Between them, the Jewish high priests and the Roman authorities, for good, pragmatic reasons, crucified Jesus. Forty years later the Romans destroyed the priests' temple and four hundred years later the Roman

Empire itself declined and fell, but the Gates of Hell cannot prevail against Christ's Church – especially when she is true to her mission.

Thy hand, O God,
has guided
thy flock, from age
to age;
their wondrous
tale is written,
full clear, on every
page;
thy people owned
thy goodness,
and we their deeds
record;
and both of this
bear witness;
one Church, one
Faith, one Lord.
Thy heralds
brought glad
tidings
to greatest as to
least;
they bade men
rise, and hasten
to share the great
King's feast;
and this was all
their teaching,
in every deed and
word,
to all alike
proclaiming
one Church, one
Faith, one Lord.

When shadows
thick were falling,
and all seemed
sunk in night,
thou, Lord, didst
send thy servants,
thy chosen sons of
light.
On them and on
thy people
thy plenteous
grace was poured,
and this was still
their message,
one Church, one
Faith, one Lord.

Through many a
day of darkness,
through many a
scene of strife,
the faithful few
fought bravely,
to guard the
nation's life.
Their gospel of
redemption,
sin pardoned,
man restored,
was all in this
enfolded:
one Church, one
Faith, one Lord.

And we, shall we
be faithless?
shall hearts fail,
hands hang
down?
shall we evade the
conflict,
and cast away our
crown?
Not so: in God's
deep counsels
some better thing
is stored;
we will maintain,
unflinching,
one Church, one
Faith, one Lord.

Thy mercy will not
fail us,
nor leave thy work
undone;
with thy right
hand to help us,
thy victory shall
be won;
and then, by all
creation,
thy name shall be
adored,
and this shall be
their anthem:
one Church, one
Faith, one Lord.

July 22nd

II Samuel 3 vv 28-39

“The public love sincerity. If you can fake that, you’ve got it made,” Bob Monkhouse is alleged to have claimed. It was very popular with the public that David mourned over the death of Abner. The cynic in me wonders whether he was really sincere. Actually, I believe that he

was. David had always shown respect for Abner. He didn't kill him when he could have done. He was prepared to make an agreement with him regarding the reuniting of the Kingdom of Israel under himself. As noted before, we have more insight into David's character than we have into the personalities of other people in the Bible and David does come over as passionate and sincere. I can't help thinking, however, of the public apologies we're now so accustomed to. Politicians, celebrities and business leaders apologise when they're caught out in some wrongdoing. Are they sincere? Would they have repented if their misdeeds had remained secret? Are they only truly sorry that they got caught? Only God knows for sure. Then there are these very public apologies for what our ancestors are supposed to have done – taken part in the slave trade, exacerbated the Irish potato famine, took away the parishes of clergy who refused to use the Prayer Book on the Restoration of King Charles II. What do these apologies mean? Are we really guilty for what our ancestors did? Can we be sure that your ancestors and mine were themselves guilty as charged? Maybe they were on the side of the angels. Do these apologies do any good or are they just PR?

July 23rd

II Samuel 4 vv 1-8

Without Abner's strong personality, Ishbosheth's reign was effectively over. Were there any other descendants of Saul able to replace him and perpetuate Saul's line? Jonathan had had a son. David had promised Jonathan that he would take care of Jonathan and his family when he became king, but Jonathan had died in battle. Like his uncle, Eshbaal, Jonathan's son was given a name ending in Baal (lord). He was originally called Meribbaal. Like his uncle, however, subsequent chroniclers changed the name Baal to Bosheth (shame). Anyway, Mephibosheth was crippled because his nurse dropped him and broke his ankles when fleeing after the death of his father. One can't help but wonder whether modern medicine could have cured him. So Mephibosheth was not a suitable candidate for kingship. Anyway he still could only have been about twelve. The sons of Rimmon decide to cut their losses and get in with David's new regime. They assassinate Ishbosheth. They have fatally misread David.

July 24th

II Samuel 4 vv 9-12

David does not approve of the regicide. He hadn't much respect for Ishbosheth but that didn't mean that he was going to countenance his murder. So Rechab and Baanah were executed and disgraced by the way their corpses were displayed, whereas Ishbosheth's head was honourably buried in Abner's grave. You could say that Rechab and Baanah got what they deserved. Justice was seen to be done. Their execution and degradation were a powerful deterrent to anybody thinking of following their example – though Joab had got away with something similar simply because he was so powerful. The purposes of punishment are retribution, deterrence & reformation. There can be no reformation in cases which end in the death penalty. Justice is supposed to be blind – to treat everybody alike, whether they be rich or poor, powerful or insignificant, the king's second in command and cousin or two guys whom nobody had ever heard of. Justice and mercy were not wholly served in this instance. Is it unrealistic to think that Joab, Rechab and Baanah could have been dealt with fairly? If it is unrealistic to think so, are there any situations in our country in our time when we would be prepared to treat individuals unfairly, unjustly & unmercifully in order to achieve a greater political end such as peace & stability?

July 25th (S James)

II Samuel 5 vv 1-5

GRANT, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* James was a fisherman who was called by Jesus to become a fisher of men. He was one of the twelve apostles (the brother of John and partner of Andrew and Simon Peter). He died the death of a martyr. David was a shepherd boy who was called by God to become King of Israel. He eventually died of old age, having attained his three score years and ten. What different lives they led, the one a passionate man, a warrior, musician and leader of men, the other described with his brother as a son of thunder, companion and disciple of Jesus, who

shared in the Lord's work and (like all the apostles) made many mistakes. We all have a calling to follow Jesus. We may be called to serve in any of many different ways, but we're all called to forsake all worldly and carnal affections, and be evermore ready to follow God's holy commandments. I'm going to stick my neck out here. The Archbishop of Canterbury recently expressed sympathy for Prince Harry for having to live up to everything which goes with being the second son of the heir to the throne. But I thought at the time of the catechism in which the young Christian says that he learns from the Ten Commandments *to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me*. Given that God called Harry to be a member of the Royal Family, isn't it his responsibility just to get on with his vocation? And isn't it your responsibility and mine to do our duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call us?

July 26th

II Samuel 5 vv 6-10

Jerusalem was already an ancient city at this time. It did not belong to any of the tribes of Israel, but to the Jebusites. It was thus a neutral capital (like Washington DC which is not in any of the US states). It was also the place where God had chosen that the Temple should be built. The city was considered to be impregnable and it would appear that the Jebusites mocked David's forces by claiming that even the lame & the blind could defend the city from David's men. They may have manned the entries into the city with the lame & the blind in order to make the point. It has been suggested that the Jebusites were relying on their pagan gods which psalms 115 & 135 describe as worthless idols, which can't speak, see, hear, smell, walk, handle or even breathe and so are utterly useless. Maybe David meant that his men should destroy the idols and exclude them from the place of worship, rather than that he expressed these harsh sentiments with regards to the disabled. Joab, unpleasant person though he was, proved himself in battle. However necessary all this may have been and whatever mitigating circumstances we can think of, however, we would surely rather pray for peace.

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 27th

II Samuel 5 vv 11-25

This is about showing that David really is the King of Israel and that he is accepted as such by friend and foe alike. Tyre is in Lebanon, famous for its cedar trees and for its wealth in general. Hiram allies himself with David and supplies the materials and men to build David's house or palace. David will later feel moved to build God a house or temple. (Palace & temple are the same word in Hebrew). More wives and concubines are a sign of David's power. So is the number of his sons. (Some people have suggested that David's love for Jonathan was of a homosexual type. In the light of his having a harem & the fact that Jonathan too was a father & the fact that such a relationship would have been regarded as undesirable in ancient Israel, this seems unlikely.) While Hiram welcomes David's accession to the throne of all Israel, the Philistines recognise a united Israel under an accomplished warrior king as a threat. They decide to get their retaliation in first! But they are thwarted. God is with David and David has the wisdom to consult with God before acting. Note the name Baal-perazzim. The perazzim bit means breach. Note the use of the name Baal for lord, however. It is later that it is realised it is dangerous to confuse the LORD with the principal Canaanite deity. S Paul says (I Corinthians 8^{5f}): For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him.

July 28th

II Samuel 6 vv 1-5

We have to cast our minds back to the time when the prophet Samuel was young and ministering at the Shrine at Shiloh, where the ark was then kept and Eli was the priest and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas were a disgrace to the priesthood. It had got to the point where the word of the LORD was precious – not because it was valued, but because it was scarce. Having been defeated once by the Philistines, the Israelites had thought that, by taking the Ark onto the battlefield, they could guarantee God's support and therefore win a victory in round two. In the event, the Philistines just fought harder. God was not on the Israelite's side because they had rejected Him. The ark was captured by the Philistines who put it in the temple of their god Dagon. Bad things started to happen to the Philistines and they sent the ark back to Israel. It remained at Kirjath-jearim for many years. Now David wants the ark in his capital city Jerusalem. This supreme symbol of God's Presence will be at the heart of the kingdom and David will personally appreciate having it close to his own home.

July 29th

II Samuel 6 vv 6-11

“David was displeased because the LORD had made a breach on Uzzah.” We too might be troubled by this incident. Uzzah presumably meant well and didn’t do any obvious harm. So why did the LORD smite him? In the end, we have to accept that the LORD He is God and that we cannot always understand Him. God is not accountable to us. We are accountable to Him. We have possibly lost our sense of awe in the Presence of God. We have lost our fear of the LORD. Now, *the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*, but, *perfect love casteth out all fear* (Psalm 111¹⁰, I John 4¹⁸). Put those two thoughts together. Fear is the perfectly natural reaction when we contemplate ourselves in the Presence of Him Who is infinitely powerful, beautiful, wise and just, our eternal Judge, evaluating our lives in the light of His infinite Holiness, able to cast us into the flames of Hell. *The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom*. And yet, He is love, perfect love. He surrenders Himself to us in and invites us to reciprocate by offering our lives back to Him in an offering of perfect love. Such love *casteth out all fear*. But, it is love that casts out fear, self-sacrificial love. There is no possibility of a casual relationship with God.

July 30th

II Samuel 6 vv 12-19

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10³¹). You can’t disrespect God. There is no room for irreverence. Indifference to God is fatal. Yet to know God, to love Him, to live in His Presence is to be richly blessed. Obed-edom was blessed because the token of God’s Presence abode in his house. How richly we are blessed if God dwells in our hearts and in our homes.

Blest are the pure in heart,
for they shall see our God;
the secret of the Lord is theirs,
their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,
to dwell in lowliness with men,
their pattern and their king.

Still to the lowly soul
he doth himself impart
and for his dwelling and his
throne
chooseth the pure in heart.

Lord, we thy presence seek;
may ours this blessing be:
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple meet for thee.

Seeing how God has blessed Obed-edom, David overcomes his displeasure and apprehension and brings the Ark to Jerusalem, giving it the full honours due to God. He himself is carried away with religious rapture.

July 31st

II Samuel 6 vv 20-23

Michal, David's first wife and the daughter of King Saul, is not impressed with David's enthusiasm. She thinks he has made an exhibition of himself. It's too easy to criticise the way other people worship. Protestants may find fault with the rituals of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Catholics may think that what we might call low church worship fails to reflect the glory of God. It may be thought that charismatics and Pentecostals are emotionally over the top. They may think that the rest of us are too cold and formal. Some churches are criticised for being too stiff and traditional, others for being too wishy washy or childish. The thing is to *worship God in spirit and in truth*, whatever we do with our bodies – singing, dancing, performing rituals, sitting still, kneeling, hands together, arms in the air. If we worship in spirit and in truth we affirm rather than find fault with our fellow Christians. We even learn from them.

August 1st (Trinity 9)

II Samuel 7 vv 1-3

Do we ever make comparisons between the way we maintain our church buildings and the way we look after our own homes? On the one hand, I've heard criticism of communities which have expended vast sums of money and other resources, hours of labour and the talents of their finest craftsmen to build amazing churches although the peasants in those places have been scratching a living and dwelling in hovels. We're still amazed and inspired by their labours when we visit great cathedrals and parish churches today. We might be a teeny-weeny bit uncomfortable, however, when we remember the poverty of the majority of those people these Churches were called to serve. The Church in the NT owned no buildings at all. Jesus didn't live in a temple or a palace, nor even, at at least some of the time, in a house. Matthew 8²⁰: *And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.* I thought of this recently when a senior cleric told me that

we as a Church need to pay ecclesiastical civil servants salaries commensurate with executives in the public and private sectors in order to get good people to work for us. Jesus was homeless. Paul supported himself and was content if he just had food to eat and clothes on his back. Does the Church of England need to reconsider her priorities?

On the other hand, I have heard preachers point out that it is a poor show if we have nice houses – comfortable & clean – and treat the place where we worship God disrespectfully – making do with poor quality materials and workmanship, not troubling about cleanliness and repairs. Similarly, it can be argued, that it is a poor show to draw more than adequate salaries ourselves but expect our ministers to survive on a pittance. It can also be argued that devoting our resources to building the most magnificent church we can for the worship of God and decorating it in such a way as to glorify Him and to tell the Gospel story is a powerful witness to the community. You and I probably can both help to maintain our parish churches financially and give to the poor, but which is more important?

GRANT to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 2nd

II Samuel 7 vv 4-11

Nathan was originally keen on David's idea to build a temple and encouraged him. But then God spoke to His prophet Nathan and gave him a word for David. God doesn't need a temple made by human hands to dwell in. God is everywhere. He fills heaven and earth. Heaven and earth dwell in God and then He is infinitely more. It is God Who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt and gave them a home in the Promised Land. It is God Who made David King of Israel. God needs nothing from us. We can only offer to Him of what He has given to us. To do so is both our duty and our joy. I Chronicles 29¹⁴, *all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.* We can worship God anywhere. We don't need a sacred space. We need people, other Christians. We ought not to forsake the assembling of ourselves

together (Hebrews 10²⁵), but we don't need a special building in which to assemble. Nevertheless such a building is an inspiration to worship and God does enable David's son Solomon to build a magnificent temple in Jerusalem. David himself doesn't get to build the temple because he is a man of blood. Solomon is a man of peace. Any temple would be defiled by violence, dishonesty, idolatry, indifference to the plight of the poor. *Give us a pure and lowly heart, a temple meet for thee.*

August 3rd

II Samuel 7 vv 12-17

Son of God, Son of David, temple, the One in Whom the fullness of God dwells, high priest, sacrifice, prophet, the power and wisdom of God, God with us, Emmanuel, Who fulfils all these things?

How sweet the name of
Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows,
heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit
whole
And calms the troubled
breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry
soul,
And to the weary, rest.

Dear Name! the Rock on
which I build,
My Shield and Hiding Place,
My never-failing Treas'ry
filled
With boundless stores of
grace!

Jesus! my Shepherd,
Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and
King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way,
my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my
heart,
And cold my warmest
thought;
But when I see Thee as
Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

Till then I would Thy love
proclaim
With every fleeting breath,
And may the music of Thy
name
Refresh my soul in death.

August 4th

II Samuel 7 vv 18-24

Looking up these hymns to include in these notes, I've both been inspired by their words and saddened by the fact that we have not been allowed to sing them. It is a marvellous thing to praise God in words and music. Here David expresses his wonder and gratitude for all that God has done for him and for the people of Israel. How often do we pause and reflect on what God has done for each one of us with wonder and gratitude? How often do we reflect on what He has done for the Church – and for the world if it will only listen to His Voice? What God did for Israel in the story of the Exodus and the rest of the OT is amazing. *What hath God wrought!* says Balaam in Numbers 23²³. But how much more has He done for us in Jesus.

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men; [*particularly to those who desire now to offer up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late mercies vouchsafed unto them.] We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

August 5th

II Samuel 7 vv 25-29

We can trust the promises of God. We can always rely on Him to be faithful and trust in His Word.

Oh, make but trial of his
love,
experience will decide
how blest are they, and
only they,
who in his truth confide.

Fear him, ye saints, and
you will then
have nothing else to fear;
make you his service your
delight,
your wants shall be his
care.

August 6th (The Transfiguration)

II Samuel 8 vv 1-18

David was a man of blood indeed. He brought peace to Israel by subduing his hostile neighbours. He used the spoils of war to enrich his own country. We're uncomfortable with this. Even in his own time, the blood on David's hands disqualified him from building the House of God. Yet most of us would fight for our own country. We believed that the only way to secure peace was to engage in world wars with casualty rates millions of times higher than in any of David's wars. Today is the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima which resulted in 66,000 deaths and 69,000 injuries. We have fought in numerous other wars and benefitted by the spoils. We were rewarded with the patent for aspirin after WWI. It was a German invention. It says that God blessed David's war efforts and I am sure that, if we embarked on another war, we'd pray for victory. How could we justify going to war if we didn't believe we were fighting in a good cause and that therefore God would be on our side? And yet! We are soldiers of the Prince of Peace. David's son Solomon was able to build the Temple because he was a man of peace. How much more was great David's greater Son the Man of Peace!

Priest. Give peace in our time, O Lord.

Answer. Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.

Priest. O God, make clean our hearts within us.

Answer. And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

The prayer for peace surely depends on the prayer for clean hearts inhabited by the Holy Spirit.

August 7th

II Samuel 9 vv 1-13

When Saul turned against David, Jonathan had been on David's side even though it meant that he would not inherit the kingdom because David was God's choice to replace Jonathan's father. David had solemnly promised to look after Jonathan when that day came. But Jonathan had died in battle on the same days as Saul. So David fulfilled his promise to Jonathan by looking after Jonathan's crippled son. It would appear that Mephibosheth had a considerable estate given to him and an honoured place in David's household.

August 8th (Trinity 10)

II Samuel 10 vv 1-19

We don't read these chapters very often, which gives us an incomplete picture of the bible story and what life was like in those days. How much have things changed? There is still war in the Middle East and in many other parts of the world. There are diplomatic misunderstandings which result in conflict. It is not unnatural to humiliate and mock enemies. It is certainly not unnatural to resent insult. The cycle has to be broken, the conflict ended. The Prince of Peace said (Matthew 5³⁹): *That ye resist not evil with evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.* There is a very high price to be paid for breaking the circle. Are you prepared to pay it?

August 9th

II Samuel 11 vv 1-5

Now, this story is well known. A powerful man conceives a fancy to a woman and takes her. Was Bath-sheba willing? We're not told. She probably had very little choice whatever her own personal feelings. We've been made very conscious lately of the possibility of men abusing their power over women. Do the rich and powerful have a sense of entitlement such that they feel that the rules don't apply to them? Do the same rules in fact apply to the rich and powerful as apply to the rest of us? They should. They did in ancient Israel. The 7th commandment applies as much to the king as it does to everybody else. That's why David couldn't afford to be found out. But breaking the 6th commandment and effectively breaking the 9th made matters very much worse. In our own day, it often turns out that the cover up does more damage to the government body or commercial corporation than the original wrong-doing. Speak the truth and shame the devil.

August 10th

II Samuel 11 vv 6-13

The story emphasises that, unlike King David on this occasion, Uriah behaves absolutely honourably. He doesn't take advantage of being recalled to court as (he believes) to be a messenger to take a holiday. Of course, David thought that Uriah would go home to his wife and therefore be deceived into thinking that the child was his. I'm writing these notes as the scandal is unfolding about Martin Bashir and the deception involved in his obtaining an interview with Princess Diana. It

appears that at the time a lowly technician was made a scapegoat. How often this happens in large organisations. Now, God is no respecter of persons. He values us all equally and we ought to value one another equally and therefore treat everybody fairly – *even though it were to our own hindrance.*

August 11th

II Samuel 11 vv 14-25

The sword devoureth one as well as another.

There is something very cold about those words of David. He has arranged for Uriah's death. In reality, David is Uriah's murderer. The fact that he has managed the deed at a distance rather than handling the murder weapon himself in no way reduces his culpability. We're responsible for our actions, for the things we leave undone which we ought to do and for the things which we do but ought not to do.

August 12th

II Samuel 11 v26&27

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen* The prayer above is this week's collect. Pleasing God. It is in our interest to please God. God is love. God loves us. God wants us to live and flourish. Sin is the failure of love. When we sin, we hurt other people. We also hurt ourselves. We know that *God desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live.* That does not mean that God will not punish the unrepentant sinner. Victims like Uriah the Hittite deserve justice. David had displeased God. We shall find later on in the story that God does not respond to his prayer by granting him what he desperately desires. God does concern Himself with the daily details of our lives.

August 13th

II Samuel 12 vv 1-6

In Nathan's story, the poor man's single ewe lamb has become a family pet. He treats it like a daughter. The anonymous flocks of the rich man are not loved and cared for in the same way. I find it interesting that, even nearly 3,000 years ago, this distinction is taken for granted. A woman in the butcher's shop at Cuxton told me that she wasn't happy to see that the meat was locally reared. She wouldn't want to eat an animal she had known when it was alive in the fields where she walked

and perhaps made a fuss of the farm animals. There is a discomfort when families raise their own rabbits or chicken and the time comes to kill and eat them. We have an interesting relationship with animals from the people who literally wouldn't hurt a fly to the people who organise dog fights and cock fights. I'm not quite sure where we ought to be on the animal rights spectrum, but I do believe that it is more pleasing to God if we come down on the side of compassion.

August 14th

II Samuel 12 v 7

Thou art the man. David was understandably angry with the rich man in the story who killed and ate his poor neighbour's pet lamb. His indignation was perfectly natural. Then Nathan says, *Thou art the man.* We judge other people differently from the way we judge ourselves. Some of us have inferiority complexes and assume that other people are better than we are. We do ourselves down. That's wrong. We are the people God made us and we all have our part in His plan for the world. It's probably a larger number of us who judge ourselves far more leniently than we judge other people, who want to remove the mote from our brother's eye without even observing the beam which is in our own eye. Jesus warns us not to judge others because we shall be judged by the same standards as we employ when we judge them. Life isn't a competition in which we strive to better (or to appear to be better) than other people. If we behave as if life were such a competition, we undermine our own sense of worth by comparing ourselves all the time with other people and we are in danger of looking down on the people we come to think of as beneath us. God is our judge and our neighbours' judge. We know what His standards are because we see Jesus. We cannot justify ourselves. We need God's mercy, which He freely gives us.

August 15th (Trinity 11, the BVM)

II Samuel 12 vv 7-14

O GOD, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Actions have consequences. God had freely given David so much. David wanted more and took what he wanted at the expense of Uriah's

wife. He took what he wanted because he could. He was rich and powerful and had come to think he could have anything he wanted. The Blessed Virgin Mary was humble and meek. God gave her the greatest gift He has ever given to any mortal, that she should be the mother of His Son. In the Magnificat, Mary's song, we hear what God thinks of human wealth and power.

MY soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded : the lowliness of his handmaiden. For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is his Name. And his mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations. He hath showed strength with his arm : he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich he hath sent empty away. He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel : as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

August 16th

II Samuel 12 vv 15-23

It is a terrible thing to lose a child. As parents would, David prayed earnestly that his child should be spared, but it was not to be. Praying to God doesn't always mean that we can get Him to do what we want Him to. God knows best, but this seems very harsh on David and on Bath-sheba and on the child. In the end, we just have to let God be God and to trust Him.

David knew that one day he would follow his child in dying. He knew that the child would not return to him in this life. I believe that he was sensible to accept this reality and that, however awful the pain of bereavement, he just had to get on with the life that still lay before him.

August 17th

II Samuel 12 vv 24&25

When parents lose a child or even in the case of a still birth, well-meaning family & friends sometimes try to console the parents with the thought that they can try again & have another child. For most very recently bereaved parents, this is not a consoling thought. They are not ready to think of another child. It is possible that they never will be

ready for another child. In any case, the child they have lost is a unique individual. If they have another child, he or she will be a unique person, not a replacement or a substitute for the lost child. It may well be that, if in their own & God's time, they do have more children, they will become absorbed by their love for these children & the need to look after. Their grief will be assuaged, but the lost child will always have a place in their hearts as well as in heaven.

August 18th

II Samuel 12 vv 26-31

David accepted that the dead child wouldn't be coming back & that he David had to get on with being King of Israel. Joab sees that he goes back to work. He pressurises him into taking over the command in the long war against the Ammonites. When I suffered two bereavements close together, the bishop & the archdeacon offered me time off. My response was that I would carry on working. I hadn't got anything else to do & I didn't see how it would help to sit & mope. But people are different. So I'd hesitate to say that other people shouldn't take time off in such circumstances. I do wonder if David put down the Ammonites more savagely than he would have done otherwise because he was still consumed by guilt & grief. Certainly, don't go back to work if you can't trust yourself to do your job properly.

August 19th

II Samuel 13 vv 1-18

Do such things happen? I'm afraid they do. The question is what are we going to do about it? We hear all these stories of assaults on girls & women in the home, on the streets, in universities & colleges, & even in schools. Rape & other forms of violence are already against the law, but the laws in question hardly seem to be enforced. Law is in any case the last resort, when all else fails. Men & boys ought not to do these things not because they are afraid of getting caught & punished but as a matter of conscience. Our consciences need to be tuned in & that is a matter of upbringing, education &, above all, faith.

August 20th

II Samuel 13 vv 19-29

Amnon was Tamar's half brother, Absalom her full brother. Tamar was naturally devastated by what happened. David was angry but doesn't appear to have done anything. Absalom determined to get revenge. The

distinction between justice and revenge sometimes seems a fine one. Both are matters of making the wrongdoer pay for his actions. But justice under the law is measured. It seeks to bring an end to the cycle of wrongdoing. The perpetrator is punished in proportion to the offence. Hopefully, others are deterred from committing similar offences. Ideally, the wrong-doer is reformed. Revenge perpetuates the cycle of evil as we shall see here. It is lawless and therefore unmeasured. It can't bring resolution, only continued bitterness. The sheep shearing festival would be a time of revelry at which the wine would flow freely. Cunningly, Absalom manoeuvres Amnon, but not David, into going to the festival which proves to be a well laid trap.

August 21st

II Samuel 13 vv 30-39

Amnon is dead. Absalom has fled into exile. At first David thought that all his sons who had attended the shearing were dead but that did not prove to be the case. Nevertheless he mourned. He accepted Amnon's death. He had deserved to die. In any case, tears wouldn't bring him back. Absalom still lived but what he had done in taking the law into his own hands was inexcusable. So he and David were parted. Psalm 133 begins, *Behold, how good & joyful a thing it is: brethren to dwell together in unity*. What a terrible thing it is when we don't – whether in families or churches or nations. If we start with the thought that God is our Father, the brotherhood of man follows from that fact, and so do the commandments which make it possible to live in love for one another and the grace which alone enables us to keep them.

August 22nd (Trinity 12)

II Samuel 14 vv 1-3

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen*.

David's relationship with his cousin Joab is an odd one. Joab is utterly ruthless and quite determined to protect his own position. On the other hand, he is fiercely loyal to David and, in his own rough and subtle way, looks out for him. So he finds a way in which to bring back the much loved Absalom. Thinking about our collect and the light it sheds

on our readings regarding David, his family and his servants, we might ponder on the meaning of what our consciences ought to be afraid of and what we can worthily ask in the name & mediation of Jesus Christ.

August 23rd

II Samuel 14 vv 4-12

The woman of Tekoah's story gives us an interesting insight into what life was like in ancient Israel. The king was the ultimate judge, but obviously, not every case could be brought to him. Communities mainly ran their own affairs. There was no police force. There were the priests and probably local judges who were authority figures, but the system really depended on families and communities enforcing the rules. The story is probably made up, but it's plausible in the context. A widow has two sons. One kills the other. If the murderer suffers under the *lex talionis*, a life for a life, she'll have no-one. So should the murderer be allowed to get away with what he has done? What would you do if you were the judge? The woman wouldn't be much better off if the fratricide went to prison for life rather than being executed as he might in a more civilised society. Women are not so dependent on men to support them today as they were then, but there are present day parallels – such as the battered wife who sticks with her husband at least in part because she has nowhere else to go with her children. David decides that it is better to let the murderer go unpunished than to leave the widow without protection or heir. At what stage in a modern family where there is domestic violence should Social Services or the police intervene and break up the family with all the possible harmful consequences which that might entail? How do the authorities decide how to balance rival claims in such difficult cases? One example is the case where the husband has paid the greater part of the cost of the family home. With no fault on his side, the wife falls for another man and divorces him. Because the judge considers that the mother is better able to look after the children and their welfare is paramount, he allows her to stay in the house with the children and the lover and orders the husband who paid most of it out. Is that fair?

August 24th (S Bartholomew)

II Samuel 14 vv 13-20

O ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who didst give to thine Apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy Word; Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that Word which he believed,

and both to preach and receive the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*. Having manoeuvred King David into saying that he would spare the errant son, the wise woman turns the tables on him and argues that, by the same logic, he should restore Absalom. David loves Absalom. The people love Absalom. Surely a clever man like David can find a way to bring him back. God loves the sinner and finds a way to bring him home. Surely the king should do the same. Just as justice can be confused with revenge, mercy can be confused with indulgence. To forgive the sinner is not to say that the sin doesn't matter, to let the sinner off, free to sin again. Justice and mercy both treat the sin and the sinner seriously. The point of both is to bring an end to the cycle of sinning, restitution for the sinned against, reformation for the sinner.

August 25th

II Samuel 14 vv 21-27

David has compromised. Absalom can return to Jerusalem but he cannot return to David's court. Now, we generally think of compromise as a good thing and so it is if it brings an end to strife, but it isn't always the best way. If you say $2+2=4$ and someone else says $2+2=6$, you're not helping by suggesting you compromise on $2+2=5$. As we shall see, this partial restoration of Absalom results in a terrible civil war. It was worse than either leaving him in exile or allowing him to return fully to the palace.

August 26th

II Samuel 14 vv 28-33

Absalom was very popular with the people and extremely good looking. I like that bit about his luxuriant hair. He had land. He was married. He had children. But he was frustrated because he was not allowed to fulfil his potential. This was partly his own fault in taking it on himself to kill Amnon for what he had done to Tamar, but I don't suppose Absalom considered this. A lot of people in this world never have the opportunity to reach their potential. Young adults are treated as children. Without the right background, it is very often hard to succeed, no matter how talented you are. It's wrong not to allow people to use their gifts.

August 27th

II Samuel 15 vv 1-6

After adopting that rather drastic method to get Joab's attention, Absalom managed to wheedle himself a bit closer to the seat of power. He still had no formal position, however. As we said a little while ago, the King of Israel was the top judge, but there was obviously far too much work for him to do and he couldn't keep up with it. So Absalom met litigants and pointed out, quite rightly, that David needed a deputy judge. Naturally, he saw himself as the ideal candidate. I'm not sure whether he would have been happy working as David's deputy judge, maybe establishing himself as David's heir apparent, or whether he was already plotting rebellion and merely preparing the way.

August 28th

II Samuel 15 vv 7-12

That should probably be four years rather than forty that Absalom sat at the gate ingratiating himself with the people. He misleads David, claiming that he is going to Hebron to worship in fulfilment of a vow. So he may have been, but his real purpose was to have himself proclaimed King. David was proclaimed King by the men of Judah (his & Absalom's own tribe) in Hebron and reigned there for seven years before becoming King of the whole of Israel. So Hebron had royal connections already. Absalom had a lot of popular support and presumably expected to be able to mount a successful coup.

August 29th (Trinity 13)

II Samuel 15 vv 13-23

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen* David was evidently alarmed and believed that Absalom's rebellion was a real threat to his kingdom. He fled the city of Jerusalem. It turned out that a lot of people were loyal to David including the Cherethites, the Pelethites and the Gittites (from Gath, a Philistine city). These were all foreigners. Sometimes we are more loved than we realise. Sometimes indeed we don't find out just how much an individual was respected until we come to his funeral. Elijah was mistaken when he thought he was the only person left in Israel who

was loyal to the LORD. *True and laudable service to the LORD*, on our part just as people were loyal to David.

August 30th

II Samuel 15 vv 24-30

There is good reason to believe that Zadok was already high priest in Jerusalem when David captured the city and made it his capital. In David's day, the city of Jerusalem was already centuries old and had been ruled over by priest kings, at least two of whom had Zadok in their names. Jesus Himself is our great High Priest and King of Kings, after the order of MelchiZeDeK. Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech, the priest at Nob, betrayed to Saul by Doeg the Edomite for helping David. Abiathar was the only one of the priests at Nob to escape the ensuing massacre. He had been David's companion since his outlaw days and had come up to Jerusalem with David. Abiathar and Zadok now worked together. Zadok brought the Ark of the covenant, but David said to return it to Jerusalem. Whether or not David returned safely to Jerusalem was in God's Hands – as are all our lives. When we think of David ascending the Mount of Olives weeping, we must think of great David's greater Son descending the Mount of Olives on Palm Sunday in triumph but also weeping over the city before His Crucifixion & Resurrection and Ascension from that same mountain 40 days later.

August 31st

II Samuel 15 vv 31-37

I was once told never to ask advice from more than one person. By all means ask advice, but then you have to make up your mind. You're responsible for your decision. You can't keep putting it off by going to a whole series of different people for advice or evade taking personal responsibility by involving a whole lot of possibly conflicting views. That's a good general principle – one counsellor only – but I have to admit that there might be rare occasions on which we should ask for more than one opinion if the issue is particularly complex. You might need a plumber and an electrician to install a power shower.

There were two highly regarded counsellors at David's court – Ahithophel and Hushai. Ahithophel was the up and coming young man and he had declared for Absalom. I get the impression that people thought that Hushai was a bit past it, but he was loyal to David and that

made all the difference If he stayed in Jerusalem, he could work with Zadok and Abiathar to bring Absalom's rebellion to an end.

September 1st

II Samuel 16 vv 1-5

What was Ziba up to? If Mephibosheth really thought that the result of the conflict between David & Absalom would be that he would be asked to be king, he was amazingly foolish. More likely, Ziba was taking advantage of Mephibosheth's lameness in order to ingratiate himself with David and become master of the estate David had provided for Jonathan's son. On the radio, at lunch time, I hear about lots of scams by which people are cheated out of their money, sometimes their life-savings or their pensions. This is particularly shameful when the scammers pick on vulnerable people. Leviticus 19:

¹³ Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

¹⁴ Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord. ¹⁵ Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. ¹⁶ Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour; I am the Lord. ¹⁷ Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. ¹⁸ Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord. God taught us better through Moses 3,000 years ago. Why don't people read the Bible and act in accordance with what God teaches us in its pages?

September 2nd

II Samuel 16 vv 5-14

Not everybody in Israel was thankful that David had taken the place of Saul. This Shimei thought that David was getting what he deserved, considering the blood that he himself had shed. Was David too tired, too depressed or too decent to allow Abishai (Joab's brother) to decapitate Shimei? Or was he thinking politically, that he might need the support of some of the people still hankering after the days of Saul to help him put down Absalom's revolt? I should like to think that

David was too decent to kill Shimei, but when David is dying (I Kings 2^{8&9}), he tells Solomon to make sure that Shimei does not escape. Maybe, his resentment festered over the years. For what ever reason he hadn't really forgiven Shimei, but we have to forgive if we are to be forgiven.

September 3rd

II Samuel 16 vv 15-23

Hushai then offered his services to Absalom (intending to undermine him). Absalom at first thought it was mean of Hushai to abandon his friend David, but then accepted him. Ahithophel's advice with regard to David's concubines was a demonstration of his disrespect for his father and that he was now the boss. Again, what the women thought about all this doesn't feature in the story. In our prayers we might think of vulnerable women in the world today exploited in the sex trade, people trafficking, modern slavery & labouring in the Asian sweatshops which produce so much of our cheap clothing.

September 4th

II Samuel 17 vv 1-14

The last verse of the last chapter makes clear that Ahithophel was the smarter counsellor. Amoral, I should say, ambitious & thrusting. I'm no military strategist, but I'm sure his counsel was the best. Send out a relatively small number of fast-moving troops and capture David while he and his supporters are demoralised and disorganised. But Absalom makes that mistake of asking a second person for advice instead of weighing up for himself what Ahithophel had recommended and taking responsibility for a decision whether or not to proceed. Hushai, knowing what he is doing, suggests what appears to Absalom and his courtiers to be a plausible strategy but which in reality will give David time to prepare for the coming battle. Absalom and his people decide to take Hushai's advice – the wrong advice – and they do so because it is the LORD's purpose to defeat Absalom's revolt. Some people think of God as quite remote and fairly detached from the affairs of this world and our own individual lives with their ups & downs, but the God of the Bible is a hands on God. Not a sparrow drops to the earth outside of His Providence. Our lives, everybody's life, everything that happens within the universe is in the Hands of God. Ephesians 6¹⁸: *Praying*

always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, we are taught by thy Holy Word, that the hearts of Kings are in thy rule and governance, and that thou dost dispose and turn them as it seemeth best to thy godly wisdom: We humbly beseech thee so to dispose and govern the heart of *ELIZABETH* thy Servant, our Queen and Governor, that, in all her thoughts, words, and works, she may ever seek thy honour and glory, and study to preserve thy people committed to her charge, in wealth, peace, and godliness: Grant this, O merciful Father, for thy dear Son's sake, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 5th (Trinity 14)

II Samuel 17 vv 15-22

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The details are confusing (at least to me) but Hushai needs to get a message to David to hurry up and cross the Jordan so that he can make ready his army before Absalom catches up with him. I wonder how old Ahimaaz and Jonathan were at this time. Their adventure reads like something out of *The Boys' Own Paper*. Baden-Powell initially founded the Scouts with a view to employing boys as agents in war zones. Thankfully, the scout movement mutated into something much more pacific. War is a terrible thing and we would want to do everything possible to avoid war and, if it happens, to protect children, not only those on our side, but also those of the enemy. So we pray for peace and work for peace. We ask for faith & hope & love for ourselves and for other people so that we may love God's commandments and obtain His promises – His Kingdom of justice, mercy & peace.

September 6th

II Samuel 17 v23

Suicide is very rare in the Bible. This is the only case of someone killing himself in cold blood, so to speak. There are two instances of men on the battlefield seeking death when it is already inevitable and they want to avoid it coming dishonourably. In Judges 9⁵⁴, Abimelech is anxious being killed by a woman. Saul didn't want to die at the hands of the Philistines. In I Kings 16¹⁸, the rebel Zimri destroys himself and

the royal palace in an act of desperation. But Ahithophel sets his affairs in order and hangs himself. This could be because he expected a much more painful death when the rebellion failed as he now knew that it would and David recovered his power, but, while there are plenty of executions in these times, I can't think of anyone being tortured to death by David (except possibly the Ammonites in chapter 12). Some people think it was Ahithophel's wounded pride which made him kill himself. I think Ahithophel lost hope which is quite often the reason commit suicide. It is a terrible thing to lose hope. We ought to know that we can always trust in God for our lives, but not everybody finds it easy to believe that.

September 7th

II Samuel 17 vv 25-29

Civil War can be the worst kind of war, turning families and friends against one another. Absalom's new commander is Amasa – a relative of Joab and Absalom and David. Mahanaim is where Saul's son Ishbosheth had had his capital and it does seem that some of the supporters of Saul have now switched their allegiance to David. Nahash was the Ammonite king who opposed Saul and supported David. It was Nahash's son Hanun who had turned against David when he became King of Ammon, provoking the reprisals which we read about in chapter 12. Now another son of Nahash, Shobi, is helping David. It is all very confusing to us reading it, but think what it must have been like for the people who lived through it all – shifting alliances, brother's hand raised against brother. It is important to pray for peace as we read our newspapers and hear the radio and TV news about what is going on in the world today.

Matthew 5³: *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* ⁴ *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

⁵ *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.* ⁶ *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* ⁷ *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.* ⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.* ⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.* ¹⁰ *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

September 8th

II Samuel 18 vv 1-3

Why would it matter more if David were killed than anyone else? Surely all human lives are equally valuable. God is no respecter of persons. When I watch one of those films where terrorists are trying to assassinate the US president, I always feel for the innocent bystander – the cleaner or doorman who gets shot in the fray. Even more thought-provoking is the case of the bodyguard who is expected to *take one for the president*. But why does the president's life matter more than that of the security guard who might have a wife and children waiting for him at home? If the president were killed, the government would carry on. The vice-president would take over. Somehow, it's the symbolism that makes the difference. It's what these kings & presidents mean to us, but we ought not to be careless of the lives of bodyguards or bystanders.

September 9th

II Samuel 18 v4

And the king said unto them, what seemeth best to you I will do. Maybe we think of people in authority – kings, generals, prime ministers, headmasters, etc.- as having the power to get their own way. In Matthew 8⁹, a centurion says to Jesus, *For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.* We may think that's its like that to be in a position of power. But in the last analysis any person's authority finally depends on his authority being accepted by others. You may rule by fear. You hope to lead by respect. Best of all you lead because you are loved and enjoy people's loyalty. But ultimately the leader depends on the led & the ruler depends on the ruled. There is a mutuality. Power is always limited. David had to accept what his subjects wanted, which in this case, was to keep him safe. They loved him and that very love constrained what he could do. When we pray for politicians and other people in authority, when we judge them and are tempted to judge them harshly, when we expect them to achieve marvels, we need to remember that, what ever powers they apparently have, they are limited in what they can do, not least by the people they are obliged to work with.

September 10th

II Samuel 18 v5

David commanded the leaders of all three divisions of his army to protect Absalom. What a position for a father to be, compelled to raise an army and wage war against his rebellious son! Many lives would be lost that day because of Absalom's rebellion. Absalom had disobeyed the fifth commandment. He was disloyal to his family and a traitor to his country. Any yet David could not bare to think of Absalom dying on the battlefield. The centurion in yesterday's quotation had asked Jesus to heal his servant who was sick. Jesus was ready to go to the centurion's house, but (v8): "The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." We use words similar to these sometimes when we receive Communion. I can't help feeling how much better it was that the centurion sought healing and we receive the Prince of Peace in the medicine of Holy Communion than that there should be strife on the battlefield. Love conquers all.

September 11th

II Samuel 18 vv 6-18

The terrain was not good for battle and there was a great slaughter. Absalom got caught in a tree and we see the ruthlessness of Joab. He wasn't going to risk any further trouble by allowing Absalom to live. The man who told Joab was probably right. Joab wouldn't have stood by him if he had disobeyed David & killed the young man. Joab involves ten other men in killing Absalom. That way, no one person can be blamed. Once Absalom is dead, his followers scatter. There is no point in carrying on the rebellion without him. Absalom was a powerful symbol. Exiled leaders, especially anointed royalty or religious leaders remain powerful symbols and, whether or not they wish to be, may continue to be foci of resistance to those with actual power. Elizabeth I eventually executed Mary Queen of Scots. Cromwell wouldn't let Charles I live. The Soviets got rid of the Tsar & his family. The Dalai Lama is a thorn in the side of the Chinese government. Killing highly respected leaders or former leaders is a risky political strategy. So is letting them live, even in exile. Moreover, rival claimants to the throne are often members of the same family as those who currently rule. Furthermore, assassinating

members of the ruling class risks creating a precedent which all rulers are naturally nervous of. “Heavy is The Head That Wears The Crown.”

September 12th (Trinity 15)

II Samuel 18 vv 19-33

KEEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy: and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Ahimaaz wanted to bring David what he thought was good news.

David’s army had won. Does he prevaricate when he tells David that he’s not sure what happened to Absalom. Ahimaaz is an enthusiastic young man and supporter of David. Cushie was probably a professional messenger. Absalom had to be beaten. Joab was probably right in practical terms – that he could not be allowed to live. But David, quite naturally, was stricken with grief. So what ought to have been done?

Our collect speaks of our frailty which cannot but fall without God and prays for us to be kept from all things hurtful & to be led in the ways of salvation. God is our only hope. We need to commit everything we do to Him right at the beginning, not just as a last resort.

September 13th

II Samuel 19 vv 1-8

David’s grief for his son far outweighed his joy in victory – which was extremely unfair to all the people who had loyally fought for him.

People in positions of leadership do sometimes have to set aside their personal feelings for the people they serve. David & Absalom is an extreme example, but there are many occasions when a monarch or a statesman has to carry despite some personal tragedy or other distraction from their public duties. I sometimes wonder when there is a big funeral for a public figure and the public rightly expect a big public display how the husband or wife or the children of the public figure (the people who loved him best) feel when all the tributes to the deceased are about his public career and the family take second place to the “important” guests.

ALMIGHTY God, the fountain of all goodness, we humbly beseech thee to bless *Charles*, Prince of Wales, and all the Royal Family: Endue them with thy Holy Spirit; enrich them with thy heavenly grace; prosper them with all happiness; and bring them to thine everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

September 14th

II Samuel 19 vv 9-15

After the reign of Solomon, Israel will split into two kingdoms – Israel (or Ephraim) & Judah. It would appear, however, that there were already tensions between the two even in the time of King David. David was of the tribe of Judah and the Judahites had made him their king in Hebron seven years before the rest of Israel accepted his dominion. So there was rivalry and jealousy between the two factions in restoring David to the throne. David was under no illusions about Joab and he thought to take advantage of the situation and reconcile the opposing factions by choosing Absalom's chief of staff Amasa to replace Joab. This will not work out well for Amasa.

September 15th

II Samuel 19 vv 16-30

What might be thought of the Saul faction return. Shimei is pardoned (for now). I should say that Mephibosheth was telling the truth and that Ziba had deceived both him & David, but David doesn't seem too sure about this and compromises between the two of them. It was imperative to avoid any further strife.

September 16th

II Samuel 19 vv 31-40

I do like this story. Barzillai was a rich man who had supported David when he had had to flee Jerusalem at the beginning of the rebellion. David wanted to reward him with a place at court. But Barzillai maintained, that at 80 years of age, he wouldn't enjoy life at court. He wanted to go home and live out his days peacefully until the time came for him to be buried in the family grave. Psalm 90¹⁰: *The days of our age are threescore years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years : yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow; so soon passeth it away, and we are gone.* I remember a very vigorous man in his eighties who often attended funerals at which we said this psalm saying that it made him somewhat uncomfortable. It is something to be very thankful for if we live into old age and in good health. It is good if we can contribute to the well-being of the Church & the world. We may be less active physically. But we can be company for people. We can talk to them. We can pray. I've known bedridden old people who've brought real joy to the people who care for them. But our time will come to stand aside and make room for the

Chimhams of this world. V12: *So teach us to number our days : that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* But that is not a tragedy. God has good things laid up for those who love Him in the world which is to come. The octogenarian I was talking about might have been a bit uncomfortable with Psalm 90, but he always liked me to stress the words in the Committal: *in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life.* I'm sure he is experiencing that right now, the eternal now.

September 17th

II Samuel 19 v41 – 20 v13

So there is conflict between Israel & Judah about restoring David to the throne and Bichri of Saul's tribe (Benjamin) sets out to lead a new rebellion Israel against Judah. David has replaced Joab with Amasa (Absalom's chief of staff) as commander of the army. Foreseeably, Joab isn't having that, kills Amasa and resumes his position. Living as we do, in a country which has enjoyed political stability and the rule of law for centuries, it is easy to forget how quickly order can break down and how hard it is to restore justice and peace. Think how many revolutions have been followed by a reign of terror, how many liberations from colonial rule have been followed by incompetent dictatorships. The Bible is strong on the need to respect authority, whether or not authority deserves respect. But it is far better when authority is deserving of respect: honest, free of corruption, competent, just & merciful, serving rather than dominating its subjects, seeking peace at home & abroad, responsible.

ALMIGHTY God, whose kingdom is everlasting, and power infinite: Have mercy upon the whole Church; and so rule the heart of thy chosen servant *ELIZABETH*, our Queen and Governor, that she (knowing whose minister she is) may above all things seek thy honour and glory; and that we, and all her subjects (duly considering whose authority she hath) may faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey her, in thee, and for thee, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

September 18th

II Samuel 20 vv 14-26

I suppose the wise woman avoided further bloodshed. Bichri had taken refuge in the city and was ready to fight. Joab was preparing to destroy the whole city in order to get at him. The wise woman ended the assault and saved the city by persuading her fellow citizens to give Joab

Bichri's head. David was the legitimate king. Bichri was a rebel. Bichri's death prevented a massacre. S James writes (3¹⁰): *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.* He's talking about the fact that lips which praise God ought not to revile human beings who are made in God's image, but there is a great deal which *ought not so to be* if we are the people of God – including bloodshed & violence, though I don't see how they can always be avoided. *Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.*

September 19th (Trinity 16)

II Samuel 21 vv 1-9

O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* This is a horrible story. The well-being of any land depends on there being justice. Despotism messes up agriculture and industry by imposing their own will on workers and by taking care of themselves & their supporters at the expense of others. Commerce and farming flourish best in well-ordered, peaceful, law-abiding jurisdictions. The biblical view is that God has a hand in this too, that He intervenes in accordance with the way a people behaves. Saul had slaughtered some of the Gibeonites. They were not Israelites, but they had been promised that they would live in peace in Israel and serve in a humble capacity in the sanctuary (Joshua 9). There is a famine in the land because of the injustice the Gibeonites have suffered. David allows them to choose how they will be compensated. They don't want money. They want Saul's family to suffer what their families had suffered at Saul's hands. They want the blood of Saul's children. David agrees. The balance is restored. Justice served, the famine is over. Ugh! But didn't the Gibeonites deserve some sort of justice? Weren't they entitled to demand that what was done to Saul's people was equivalent to what was done to their people? Was it an insult even to offer money as compensation for the slaughter of their loved ones? What we would have hoped is that the Gibeonites could have forgiven what had been done to them, but that would have been a big ask – not to ignore the reality of the atrocity, but to acknowledge its full horror and yet to

forgive. It's an issue today in many parts of the world including Northern Ireland – to take seriously the crimes committed in the Troubles, but to forgive and to move forward together, rather than insisting on the retributive justice the victims are entitled to. The Truth & Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, achieved a great deal in the aftermath of apartheid.

September 20th

II Samuel 21 vv 10-14

On Good Friday, we think of Mary at the foot of her Son's Cross. How many mothers have seen their sons executed – sometimes for real & serious crimes, sometimes for relatively trivial wrongdoing such as a poor child stealing a nobleman's handkerchief, sometimes for being on the losing side in a war, sometimes for religious or political reasons? On the one hand, a mother's love. On other hand, brutal execution. Where did the human race go wrong? The human race went wrong in rejecting our God – original sin. The only way back is through the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ on which perfect love meets and overcomes the worst that humanity can do.

September 21st (S Matthew)

II Samuel 21 vv 15-22

O ALMIGHTY God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist; Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen*

One way of profiting from the battle scenes in the bible is to think of the need to conquer our spiritual foes. This we can only do through the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Matthew's besetting sins were covetous desires and inordinate love of riches. What are our besetting sins? Wherever love fails, there is sin.

He who would
valiant be
'gainst all disaster,
let him in
constancy
follow the Master.
There's no
discouragement
shall make him
once relent

his first avowed
intent
to be a pilgrim.

Who so beset him
round
with dismal
stories
do but themselves
confound

his strength the
more is.
No foes shall stay
his might;
though he with
giants fight,
he will make good
his right
to be a pilgrim.

Since, Lord, thou
dost defend
us with thy Spirit,
We know we at the
end,

shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee
away!
I'll fear not what
men say,

I'll labour night
and day
to be a pilgrim

September 22nd

II Samuel 22 vv 1-51

This song that David sings we know as Psalm 18. At first, we find the psalms difficult. They are hard to sing if we are not used to Anglican chant or plainsong. If we say them, we may find the words hard to understand or be unable to see how they are applicable to our own situation. But it is worth persevering with the daily recitation of the psalms. Remember that they would have been sung or recited by Jesus. Remember that Jesus fulfils the Psalms as He fulfils all Scripture. He is the Word of God. Read the Psalms (like the whole Bible) in the Light of Christ. David here is so grateful to God, so awed by God, so committed to God and so much in love with God. Read the psalm remembering how Jesus is the Son of David & we are His brothers & sisters.

September 23rd

II Samuel 23 vv 1-7

To be a ruler, to exercise authority of any kind, is a vocation. God is the King. Christ is the King. All human authority is answerable to God. All human rulers come under God's judgment and are in need of His mercy. Countries are well-governed or not depending on how much or how little they are ruled on Christian principles. We pray for our leaders. We respect our leaders. We support our leaders – though not unconditionally. Only God is worthy of unconditional submission. *Sons of Belial* means bad people, people whose crimes trouble decent people and destabilise society. Those in authority must deal with them firmly – but also fairly and not without the hope of redemption.

1 Conquering
kings their titles
take
From the foes they
captive make;
Jesus, by a nobler
deed,
From the

thousands he
hath freed.
2 Yea, none other
Name is given
Unto mortals
under heaven,
Which can make
the dead arise,

And exalt them to
the skies.
3 Rather gladly for
that Name
Bear the Cross,
endure the shame;
Joyfully for him to
die

Is not death but
victory.
4 Jesus, who dost
condescend
To be called the
sinner's friend,

Hear us, as to
thee we pray,
Glorying in thy
Name to-day.
5 Glory to the
Father be,

Glory, Holy Son,
to thee,
Glory to the Holy
Ghost,
From the saints
and angel-host.

September 24th

II Samuel 23 vv 8-39

This long list of names might not mean much to us. As I write this, a memorial to those killed in the Normandy Landings in 1944 has just been unveiled. There are people alive today who remember some of those commemorated in this way. But there will come a time when nobody alive actually remembers them. Only their names and written records will remain as for these other warriors from the time of David commemorated in our bibles. You get a sense of their comradeship, their courage and prowess, their loyalty. The little story in vv 14-17 is particularly poignant and speaks of the character of David. These people who have died whether in 1944 or hundreds of years BC are not lost. Neither are they reduced to just names and a mention in history. They have stood before the judgment seat of God. Their eternity has been determined by their acceptance or rejection of His mercy.

September 25th

II Samuel 24 vv 1-4

This is hard. Why did David decide to conduct a census? The bible says that it was because God's anger was kindled against Israel, but it does not say why. We read the same story in I Chronicles 21 where we read that it was Satan who provoked David to carry out the census. If you read the first couple of chapters of Job, you will see that Satan works within what God permits or commands. (Given that God is all-powerful, there is probably no difference between what God commands and what God permits.) The point is that God is in control of everything. The terrible events recorded in this chapter lead up to God's good purpose of establishing His House (the Temple) in Jerusalem. Why is it wrong for the king to carry out a census? One reason is that we belong to God, not to the king. God is our King. King David and Queen Elizabeth II are His viceroys. They don't own us. We are the people of God. The point of the census is for David to take control, to exert sovereignty which properly belongs to God and to the

people. This is point worth remembering as the modern state demands to know and to record more and more of our personal information.

September 26th (Trinity 17)

II Samuel 24 vv 5-9

Even the normally ruthless Joab, knew that David was doing wrong, but even he couldn't stop the king on this occasion. So the census went ahead. They travelled throughout the land counting the men capable of fighting in the king's army.

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

Prevent in this context means *go before*. The prayer is that God will be both in front of us and behind us in our lives, protecting us from danger, provoking us to good works, safeguarding us from sin.

God be in my head, and in my thinking.

God be in my eyes, and in my looking.

God be in my mouth, and in my speaking.

Oh, God be in my heart, and in my understanding.

September 27th

II Samuel 24 vv 10-17

David acknowledges that he has sinned in conducting the census.

Through the prophet Gad, God gives David the choice of punishment. It seems that David leaves it up to God. But, as David himself says, why punish all the people because of the wrong-doing of the king? I suppose we do all suffer if our leaders embark on a foolish war, mismanage the economy, allow the planet to be trashed by pollution or adopt policies calculated to oppress the civilian population. A whole population may suffer as a consequence of the wickedness or stupidity of its leaders. But this is very direct – a plague sent as punishment for sin. How pertinent is this to our present plight? Did God command or permit the corona virus to wreak havoc with the world's population? If so, is this a punishment for our sin? If it is, for what are we being punished? What should we do about it? Certainly, prayer and repentance are always good responses. To use our God-given gifts and talents to care for the sick, to find cures, to prevent infection, to deal with the damage to our economy, to help those whose education has been disrupted, to support people who are finding lockdowns and other restrictions hard. They are

all good things to do and to pray for. I believe that Christian people can fall into either of two opposite errors here. One is to be too quick to say that the corona virus is a punishment sent by God and to identify as the sinners who have brought it on us all people for whom we already have little respect, people who do things which we personally already disapprove of. The opposite error is to say that this is nothing to do with God. If God isn't in charge when the world faces its greatest challenge for decades, He isn't the God of our Lord & Saviour Jesus Christ. There would be in that case no point to prayer and there would be no grounds for hope except in our own human cleverness and the natural tendencies of plagues to die out eventually anyway. The Christian response must be to be open humbly to what God is saying to us at this time.

September 28th

II Samuel 24 vv 18-25

So the site where the temple is to be built is determined as the place where David met the angel of the LORD and the plague was stayed. Threshing floors were often thought of as holy places with their association with God's provision for our food.

September 29th (Michaelmas)

I Chronicles 29 vv 1-9

David prepared everything that was necessary for his son Solomon to build the House of God. The people also enthusiastically offered what they had for the worship of God in the sanctuary. The temple and its worship reflected the worship of heaven. The descriptions of the temple and the rites conducted there point us to the ultimate reality of the worship of God in heaven, the worship in which we share in a partial way in our services in Church and in our personal Christian lives, the worship of which we shall fully partake when we see Him as He is.

O EVERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy Angels alway do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 30th

I Chronicles 29 vv 10-18

Exalt in this passage. All these rich gifts which David and the people of Israel offer to God are but a fraction of the good gifts which He has given to them. Everything we have comes from God and our lives ought to be lived in a spirit of thanks and praise. It is good to reflect sometimes on what God has done for us and to return praise, each one of us for the particular blessings each of us has received. It follows inevitably that our lives are only fully lived when they are lived as an offering of praise to God.

ALMIGHTY God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men; We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*