

Sunday 22nd March 2020

Lent 4

Purple



Collect

Merciful Lord, absolve your people from their offences, that through your bountiful goodness we may all be delivered from the chains of those sins which by our frailty we have committed; grant this, heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our blessed Lord and Saviour, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

1 Samuel 16:1-13 English Standard Version (ESV)

David Anointed King

16 1 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." 2 And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3 And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you." 4 Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" 5 And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. 6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." 7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." 10 And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before

Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.” 11 Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest,[a] but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” 12 And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Footnotes: a. or *smallest*.

COMMENT: Ancient Israelite sagas make great stories, but also convey rich spiritual truths. The story of God’s prophet Samuel selecting David to replace the failed King Saul had profound significance for Israel’s future. It probably formed part of an ancient cycle of legends about David long before it became part of the written history or scriptures of Israel. Several elements of Old Testament historical and religious tradition as well as some real literary pathos stand out in this brief excerpt. Israel’s monarchy was a divinely appointed institution, but still subject to the vicissitudes of human political power struggles. Verses 1-3 point to Samuel’s hesitation to follow the Lord’s command to find a replacement. Samuel had genuine feelings for his prodigy who had turned out so badly. The strategy inspired by the Lord to avoid Saul’s wrath, however, points to Samuel’s fear that he will be seen as the initiator of a revolution. Verses 4-5 describe the suspicion which met the prophet’s mission in Bethlehem. In part, this may have been no more than tribal rivalry. Saul was a Benjaminite from Gibeah, just north of Jerusalem. David was a Judean from Bethlehem, in the adjacent tribal territory immediately south of Jerusalem. (Northern and southern Ireland come to mind as modern parallels.) Politically, the purpose of the monarchy had been to unite the diverse tribes of Israel after two hundred years of invasion and settlement in Canaan. The prophet’s task may have been made more difficult by a certain amount of competition for preference. The sacrifice to which Samuel invited Jesse and his sons involved a ritual washing which brought each member of the family before Samuel individually. Samuel’s struggle to find the right man, however, indicates how his own sense of values had to change in the process. True to the nature of inspiration, the conversation between Yahweh and Samuel obviously took place within the prophet’s own

mind. The end of the story (verses 11-13) introduces a new set of criteria for the monarchy. The whole story has been cast in a theological and romantic mold with a double meaning: The Lord's will for Israel was that the nation should have a worthy leader. It was also the Lord's intention that the nation itself should not be so powerful that it would not feel the need for divine protection and providence. Every modern nation state and government could well heed this enlarged consciousness of divine sovereignty exercised in historical events.

John 9:1-41 English Standard Version (ESV)

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

9 1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

8 The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." 10 So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

18 The Jews[a] did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19 and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20 His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. 21 But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” 22 (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus[b] to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) 23 Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” 25 He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26 They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27 He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” 28 And they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30 The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34 They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”[c] 36 He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” 37 Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” 38 He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” 41 Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt;[d] but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.

Footnotes: a. Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 22. b. Greek *him*. c. some manuscripts *the Son of God*. d. Greek *you would not have sin*.

COMMENT: John recorded a persistent tradition that Nicodemus was a secret follower of Jesus (Not only in the present passage but in John 19:38). In this interlocution with Nicodemus, he represented the whole Jewish nation blind to the truth. Yet in coming to Jesus secretly seeking a deeper understanding of who Jesus really is, he also represented certain of the Pharisees who did not oppose Jesus' unique ministry and teaching. Nicodemus was apparently a very wealthy man as well as a member of the supreme court of Israel, the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus later participated in Jesus' burial by bringing a great supply of spices to prevent the body from causing offensive odors while decaying. Thus, like all the rest of the disciples, he did not believe in or anticipate the Resurrection. As a Pharisee, nonetheless, he would have believed in resurrection as a messianic event. Again, this points to John's theme that the fundamental issue that Jesus' presence raised: Who is he? The context of this reading proclaims that faith in Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified, brings new life – Spiritual, and eternal life. Judgment occurs not at some heavenly court assize which decides between a lifetime of good and evil behavior, but here and now in the way we respond or reject the life offered to us through Jesus Christ. The reference to Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9) symbolised the healing that faith brings. Later, John's narrative (9:1-41) reiterates this same metaphor with considerable force regarding the man born blind whom Jesus healed and the Jewish authorities who challenged him. The ultimate question to which each person must respond is: Have you seen the Light? As verse 21 puts it, not our words, but our actions will be our answer.

Psalm 23 *Dominus regit me* Grail Psalter

℟ **In the Lord's own house shall I dwell for ever and ever.**

¹ The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.

² Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.

Near restful waters he leads me,

³ to revive my drooping spirit. **℟**

He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.

⁴ If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.

You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort.

℟ In the Lord's own house shall I dwell for ever and ever.

⁵ You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.

My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing. **℟**

⁶ Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.

In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever. **℟ .**

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This shepherd's psalm is perhaps the most loved of all in our Bible. It still brings strength and solace to the faithful. Ancient tradition and a title in the Hebrew Scriptures claimed that it was from the hand of David, Israel's legendary shepherd king. Though not entirely impossible, it is unlikely. Reference to the "house of the Lord" in verse 6 indicates a later date, since the temple was not built until after David had died. On the other hand, prior to the building of the temple by Solomon, the tabernacle of the wilderness wanderings was also considered The Lord's dwelling place. On the whole, the metaphor of the divine shepherd appeared in many Old Testament references (Psalm 100:3; Ezekiel 34; 37:24). This should not surprise us because the ancient Israelites to whom the Old Testament authors looked for their definitive traditions were primarily a pastoral people with their chief wealth represented by their flocks. During their early history, they depended on flocks of sheep for most aspects of their livelihood including food, clothing, tent, a medium of exchange and the central offering of ritual sacrifice. Even today in the thoroughly urbanized state of Israel, one can

still see Palestinian shepherds with their large flocks on hillsides within a very short distance of Jerusalem and Jericho. There is a second metaphor which memory frequently overlooks in reciting this psalm. Verse 5 transfers the scene to the obligatory hospitality which every Middle Eastern pastoral society extended to anyone fleeing from enemies. Tribal feuds caused many such flights. A hunted man merely had to touch the tent of anyone with whom he might seek refuge to lay upon his host the requirement of providing sanctuary and sustenance. As seen by the psalmist, the divine host provides far more than is necessary: indeed a feast with sweet unguents poured on his head and an overflowing wine cup.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you give us the spirit of discipline, that we may triumph over evil and grow in grace, as we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed.

Post Communion

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Saviour gave his back to the smiters and did not hide his face from shame: give us grace to endure the sufferings of this present time with sure confidence in the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**

