

Reflection for Pentecost 3 by Rev'd Canon Michael Last

*"When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses."*

*Deuteronomy 17:14 GNB*

As today's Old Testament reading begins, a new era was dawning for the Israelite nation. In anointing the young David to be the next king, the prophet Samuel was signaling the rise of a man who would ultimately, in the nation's history, stand head and shoulders above those who would follow. He would establish a single unified kingdom, capture and make Jerusalem its capital for the first very time, and lay the foundations upon which King Solomon would build in the next generation, establishing a temple in Jerusalem.

Rather than spending time thinking about the history of Israel, let us focus our thoughts on David, his character, and his journey with God; because in doing so we gain so many insights into our own walk with God, insights that can feed into our own development and growth.

Firstly, David does not volunteer to be king - he is chosen by God. In fact, he is not even present at the beginning of the selection procedure. Long before David hears or responds God has already selected him and, at the point of his calling, he would not appear to be the natural choice - just a young boy looking after his family's sheep. "Go to Bethlehem," says God to Samuel "to a man named Jesse, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

*"When Samuel saw Eliab, he said to himself, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen." But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart."*

This is not a contest based on appearance or public perception - no online public vote - rather David is God's choice. God knows and starts to mold us as individuals well before we are aware of his intent or are prepared even to accept it. God looks at what can be in spiritual terms; what we can be, with his hand guiding us, rather than what we are able to be on our own. Why? So that ultimately it cannot be seen as you or me at work but rather God at work with us and through us.

Secondly, when David is chosen, he is still raw, a rough diamond; he has much to learn and, as he does so, he will make mistakes; but he can grow, learn, and be nurtured, with God's spirit at work within him. What did Samuel see as he looked at the boy? *"a handsome, healthy young man, and his eyes sparkled. The Lord said to Samuel, "This is the one—anooint him!" ... Immediately the spirit of the Lord took control of David and was with him from that day on."*

The same should be true within our church life: tomorrow's leaders, be they ordained or lay, do not just appear; they have to be sought out and nurtured in ways that will help them to grow both in ability, strength and understanding of the faith.

For David, his time as king would not commence for many years, a time in which he had much to learn and experience life's ups and downs; a time most importantly to prepare himself for the main task God had for him. Look at David's CV and the diversity is fascinating: - Shepherd, Musician, Courtier, Soldier, and Out-Law. Each profession taught him lessons that would prove invaluable when he was king. Yet, as you reflect on that list, few if any are training direct from God, in a religious sense, rather God working through other agencies, even a spear flying in David's direction from the hand of King Saul.

Similarly, in our own day, God works molding and shaping us, not just through the church but also through those who maybe have no idea they are part of God's plan. For me personally, time spent working in a secular training environment was one of the key steps towards ordination, a place where key elements in my own personal development could take place, although at the time I may have argued to the contrary. The same is true for other roles within the church; skills such as accounting, secretarial work, musicianship, they are learnt often in other settings and then used in the service of God.

The final thing I love about David's story is that, despite who he was, God's anointed king through whom God would

do great things, he was never perfect. Flaws in his nature and his behavior were still there and not ignored by God. And is that not true of all of us? Each of us fail, each of us makes mistakes, however good a Christian we are. That does not mean God rejects us and cannot use us.

For David, his area of weakness lay in his personal life and his family relationships His lust for Bathsheba for example, led him to steal another man's wife, even going so far as to arrange for him to die in battle. His failure in family relations led to the death of one of his sons and to civil war. He could lead a kingdom, but his family - that was a very different matter. Yet, this is the man to whom a good few of the Psalms are attributed. The man who right through his life worshipped God.

None of us are perfect this side of heaven, but we, like David, can still serve God and be used by him.

If the story of David teaches us anything it is that God walks with us through our lives, that he is there in many cases before we are, shaping and directing the way ahead, providing the very strength we need to take the next step. The path he sets will not always be easy, a road we may do not always want to stay on, as our sin and desires get in the way, but each time we come back - God is still there.

Let me close with a psalm attributed to David one we know well – Psalm 23.

*The Lord is my shepherd; therefore, can I lack nothing.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.*

*He shall refresh my soul and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;*

*for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

*You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me;*

*you have anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be full.*

*Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,*

*and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*