

Daily Devotions from the URC

Saul, David & Solomon The Establishment & Disintegration of the Kingdom 2

14th – 31st October 2018



Introduction

After settlement in the Promised Land Israel saw itself as a theocracy. From time to time God would raise up a judge who would lead the people but, over time, the clamour for a king grew. The experience of monarchy was not, it must be said, a happy one. Saul was unstable, David - lauded as the godly king - was an adulterer and murderer and Solomon - seen as wise - enslaved people for his

building projects, expanded the kingdom beyond what it could cope with and, after his death, it split in two - the northern Kingdom of Israel with Judah in the South. The stories of these flawed kings have fascinated, and informed, God's people for thousands of years. The stories, from time to time, reflect ideas about God which we now find troubling and care should be taken when commenting on some of the stories.

Andy Braunston

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It's quite understandable. Saul has made David's life a complete misery, trying to murder him almost since they met. It's right that David should express his anger, fear, frustration to his Lord.

But why this lament then? It sounds more like something you'd write when your best friend dies, or someone you admire. When the person you'd been hoping would walk under a bus (or the Old Testament equivalent) finally gets it, shouldn't you rejoice? Every good story should end with the goodies triumphing over the baddies.

And surely, it's a bit hypocritical to pray for God to smite your enemy and then write a lament when he does.
Or perhaps, are people a bit more complicated than just 'goodies' or 'baddies'?

Prayer

God of Justice, God of mercy,
who causes your sun to rise on the evil and on the good,
teach us to see others and ourselves through your eyes;
to rightly lament the faults in ourselves
and generously praise you for the good in others;
be they our friends or our enemies.
That we may be your children,
through Christ our Lord, Amen

Sunday 14th October PSALM 68 1-10

The Rev'd Angela Rigby is minister at Christ Church URC Tonbridge and St Johns Hill URC Sevenoaks.

May God arise, and may his foes
Be scattered far and put to flight.
As smoke is blown before the wind,
So may your foes be blown from
sight:
As wax is melted by the fire
May they before God's wrath expire.

But may the righteous all be glad;
May they rejoice and sing aloud.
Sing praise to God, sing to his name;
Extol the One who rides the cloud;
For he alone is named the LORD—
With joy all praise to him accord.

A father to the fatherless,
Of widows' rights the champion,
Is God within his holy place;
He gives a home to the forlorn.
He leads the captives forth with
song;
To rebels barren wastes belong.

When you, O God, went out and led
Your people through the desert
plain—
When through the wilderness you
marched,
Earth shook and heaven poured
down rain
Before the God of Sinai's hill,
Before the God of Israël.

O God, with showers you refreshed
Your heritage so dry and bare.
And so your people settled down
And made their habitation there.
And from your overflowing store
You made provision for the poor.

Reflection

In a crowded train station, people watch the boards. "Delayed." Over the tannoy a person explains there's a signalling failure. Wandering amongst the would-be travellers is a homeless man, asking for help. A stranded traveller decides not to rush past as normal, but instead stops, offers the man a meal of his choice, friendly conversation, and a bottle of water for later.
Getting from Point A (Psalm 68) to point B (train station)

The tracks this Psalm lays out are:

A plea for God to restore God's ways of doing stuff
A vision that the people are so chuffed that they thank God

God's ways reach out to those without a place in the centre of the community.
The implication – God did it before, why wouldn't God do it now?

As we walk the way and live the life of Jesus today, some days the trains run perfectly, sometimes we get delayed. At those times it's easy to focus on the heartbreak or the complication. Rather than turn inward, the Psalm encourages us to look to God and to give thanks to God by helping the most vulnerable around us.

This Psalm is a journey from God acting to the poor being provided for, with stops of remembering God's goodness along the way. As disciples of Christ, those who see what Jesus was doing and then learn to do it ourselves, I wonder if we should consider our part in this? Maybe our role is to pray that God put the world to right, leads us on, and then step out in obedience and expectation, following God wherever He leads and to whomever He leads us to?

Somewhere in the midst of the occasional delay, when our journey slows down, there is a homeless man looking for food.

God,
As we keep our eyes on you, help us to be aware of those travelling with us.
Amen

[Monday 15th October](#) [David plays for Saul](#)

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

I Samuel 16: 14 - 23

Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, 'See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command the servants who attend you

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions.

O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
who clothed you with crimson, in luxury,
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain upon your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
greatly beloved were you to me;
your love to me was wonderful,
passing the love of women.

How the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war perished!

Reflection

"How the mighty have fallen" – it's a phrase we still use, but the connotations have changed rather. Today, we might use it of a politician who climbed to the top on the bodies of comrades, now disgraced and removed from office. We might use it of an overly-ambitious colleague, once the boss's pet, now sacked for fraud; the jumped-up cheat who finally got what they deserved.

But when David speaks these words over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, there is no triumph at another's downfall. There is no sense of 'serves them right'. Which, to be honest, is rather strange.

How many Psalms are David praying that God would strike his enemies? Lots! "O God, break the teeth in their mouths" he prays in Psalm 58, "The righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance done." And it's probably Saul that David is writing about.

Lord Jesus, you had no grave of your own,
your body was brutalised before death,
and no arrangements could be made for your funeral,
give grace to those who wash corpses,
tend to the dead
and ensure dignity to the deceased,
that as they await resurrection,
we, and they, may sing your glory. Amen.

Wednesday 31st October David's Lament

Fay Rowland is a graduate student at Wesley House, Cambridge, and worships at St Botolph's Church, Northamptonshire.

from 2 Samuel 1: 17 - 27

David intoned this lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. (He ordered that The Song of the Bow be taught to the people of Judah; it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said:

our glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!

Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,
the daughters of the uncircumcised will exult.

You mountains of Gilboa,
let there be no dew or rain upon you,
nor bounteous fields!
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,
the shield of Saul, anointed with oil no more.

From the blood of the slain,
from the fat of the mighty,
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
nor the sword of Saul return empty.

to look for someone who is skilful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.' So Saul said to his servants, 'Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.' One of the young men answered, 'I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him.' So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, 'Send me your son David who is with the sheep.' Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armour-bearer. Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David remain in my service, for he has found favour in my sight.' And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

Reflection

"If music be the food of love, play on" opines Duke Orsino in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, attesting to the power of music: soothing; enraging; stirring; calming. It is difficult to suggest that, as humans, we can be indifferent to the power of music.

Some musical moments remain with us for a long time. I well remember a haunting a capella solo of the 23rd Psalm sung in Iona Abbey. A sublime moment on a peaceful summer evening.

On the other hand, musical instruments have been classified as weapons of war (specifically the Great Highland Bagpipe) because of their power to fire up men to fight.

Dame Evelyn Glennie, the Scottish virtuoso percussionist, has been profoundly deaf since the age of 11 but anyone who has heard her perform can attest that even deafness does not stand in the way of powerful music making.

So when one correspondent to a national newspaper recently suggested that the fundamental purpose of music was to entertain, the response came swiftly:

“it is an attempt to communicate how it feels to be human, in a language beyond words”.

It is therefore no surprise to read that the wily boy David soon learned that by playing his lyre, Saul could be calmed down when an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. Sweet music calms the savage breast.

When it comes to music in worship, it behoves us to remember that power. When those of us who lead worship choose hymns or worship songs, we usually pay great attention to the words, but perhaps less so to the music, leaving that to the organist, keyboard player, worship group or whoever drives the digital machine. Often, that works well, but if God is to be truly glorified, music, words and intent must cohere to communicate how it feels to be a child of God, in a language beyond words.

Prayer

When in our music God is glorified, and adoration leaves no room for pride, it is as though the whole creation cried, Hallelujah!

How often, making music, we have found a new dimension in the world of sound, as worship moved us to a more profound Hallelujah!

(Fred Pratt Green, R&S 414)

So be it! Amen

[Tuesday 16th October David and Goliath 1](#)

Linda Rayner, is an Elder at Bramhall URC and URC Coordinator for fresh expressions

from 1 Samuel 17

Now the Philistines gathered their armies for battle...Saul and the Israelites gathered and encamped in the valley of Elah, and formed ranks against the Philistines. ...And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armoured with a coat of mail; the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze. He had greaves of

sons from the wall of Beth-shan. They came to Jabesh and burned them there. Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted for seven days.

Reflection

I have taken hundreds of funerals over the years: celebrations after a life well lived; gut wrenchingly sad following the death of a child or a life wasted through drugs or alcohol; others where the only response was to commend the deceased to God’s mercy and care after a truly awful life. In some the family were, frankly, indifferent; in others the family was more interested in the feud (or the will) than the deceased.

In all the funerals I have taken, however, I have always been struck by the respect and professionalism of undertakers. In my previous ministry I was very involved with one firm, in particular, and was amazed at the care they showed to the body of the deceased; the care of the embalmer, a hairdresser who would come and give women who had died a final hair do, so they looked good - for no charge, and the general sense of gentleness the undertakers always took - mindful the person had been loved and had loved throughout life.

A common aspect of almost all human cultures is the respect we give to the bodies of the dead. Today’s reading, then, is shocking. Saul’s understandable fear about how his body would be desecrated by his enemies, and the fearlessness of the “valiant” men who went to reclaim it and give it a decent burial, reminds me of the women who went to tend to Jesus’ body after his bloody death.

We have followed Saul’s story over the last few weeks, seen his instability, jealousy, cunning and scheming facing a son-in-law determined to usurp him, a relentless enemy and, at the same time, seeking to consolidate his hold on the throne. We may not have been very impressed with him but feel he deserved better than this end.

Pray today for those who die, unloved and unlamented, and for those who undertake their final journeys ensuring dignity and grace.

Son of David, exhibited the same level of love and mercy and his ancestor, even forgiving his persecutors while on the Cross.

Prayer

God of mercy, love and peace, teach us to hold your ways in mind in the face of provocation, hatred, violence and anger. May we learn to cut the corners of cloaks off, rather than cutting the corner of reason and discussion and going straight to conflict. Amen

Tuesday 30th October Saul's Death

The Rev'd Andy Braunston is minister of Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton URCS in the Synod of Scotland's Southside Cluster.

1 Samuel 31: 1 - 13

Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and many fell on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard upon Saul; the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by them. Then Saul said to his armour-bearer, 'Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, so that these uncircumcised may not come and thrust me through, and make sport of me.' But his armour-bearer was unwilling; for he was terrified. So Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. When his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. So Saul and his three sons and his armour-bearer and all his men died together on the same day. When the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their towns and fled; and the Philistines came and occupied them. The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head, stripped off his armour, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to the houses of their idols and to the people. They put his armour in the temple of Astarte; and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men set out, travelled all night long, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his

bronze on his legs and a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron; and his shield-bearer went before him. He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, 'Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants; but if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.' And the Philistine said, 'Today I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man, that we may fight together.' When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

Now David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons... David was the youngest; the three eldest followed Saul, but David went back and forth from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. For forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening. Jesse said to his son David, 'Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them.' David rose early in the morning, left someone in charge of the sheep, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him. All the Israelites, when they saw the man, fled from him and were very much afraid. The Israelites said, 'Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. The king will greatly enrich the man who kills him, and will give him his daughter and make his family free in Israel.' David said to the men who stood by him, 'What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?' The people answered him in the same way, 'So shall it be done for the man who kills him.'... When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. David

said to Saul, 'Let no one's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.' Saul said to David, 'You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.' But David said to Saul, 'Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.' David said, 'The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.' So Saul said to David, 'Go, and may the Lord be with you!' Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, 'I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.' So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

Reflection

The Israelites were terrified. Apart from physical size, Philistines were a sophisticated race who had settled on the coastal plain of Palestine around 1200 BC. They were politically astute, technologically advanced and fierce warriors, and for 150 years they had advanced across the Land.

Now there was a potential battle situation as armies faced each other, yet it was acceptable for 'champions' (selected individuals) to settle the conflict and prevent unnecessary waste of lives. That's why the Philistines sent Goliath, a fearsome sight with his massive body armour and heavy weapons shining in the sun.

By contrast, David was a boy with a busy life serving as musician and armour-bearer in the palace, he also carried out duties at home, and tended his father's sheep. Unlike Goliath, David wasn't a trained warrior, so Saul didn't want David to face Goliath.

repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. Today you have explained how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. For who has ever found an enemy, and sent the enemy safely away? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. Now I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not wipe out my name from my father's house.' So David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home; but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Reflection

What I love most about the stories in the Hebrew Scriptures is not that they are full of magnificent heroes who get everything right (or indeed others who are out and out 'baddies.')

Rather, again and again I see God working through frequently flawed and imperfect people ... just like you and me!

I find it reassuring and encouraging that the first King of the Hebrews was in many ways a disaster, although actually Saul achieved a huge amount in the face of what I see as a massively challenging health condition. And likewise David, as we shall explore later, is far from lily-white. But again what I admire about the compilers of the tales is that they included the stories when the characters let themselves down dreadfully! Moses, Samson, Jephthah and indeed David are cases in point and their imperfections were not written out of the Scriptures.

But here, David does the right thing even if not the strategically advantageous thing. He proves his worth and his loyalty when he has the opportunity to deal with his adversary once and for all. He chooses, rather, to show mercy to his father-in-law. We live in an era when people, politicians and world leaders, in my view, far too often jump to conflict and confrontation when meeting, talking and working out things peacefully are not only possible, but preferable too.

Would we have the Syrian refugee numbers, the rise of al-Qaeda / ISIS etc. if that better way had been followed, I wonder? We follow a Saviour who taught justice, peace and turning the other cheek after all, and one who perhaps, as a

are deep, whose troubles are life sapping. We pray, God, that you will quickly help and save...

In Christ's name we pray. Amen

[Monday 29th October David Spares Saul](#)

The Rev'd Peter Clark is the URC Minister of the Bridport and Dorchester Joint Pastorate (Methodist & URC)

from 1 Samuel 24: 1 - 22

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, 'David is in the wilderness of En-gedi.' Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to look for David and his men in the direction of the Rocks of the Wild Goats. He came to the sheepfolds beside the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. The men of David said to him, 'Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, "I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you."' Then David went and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. Afterwards David was stricken to the heart because he had cut off a corner of Saul's cloak. He said to his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to raise my hand against him; for he is the Lord's anointed.' So David scolded his men severely and did not permit them to attack Saul. Then Saul got up and left the cave, and went on his way. Afterwards David also rose up and went out of the cave and called after Saul, 'My lord the king!' When Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance. David said to Saul, 'Why do you listen to the words of those who say, "David seeks to do you harm"? This very day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you into my hand in the cave; and some urged me to kill you, but I spared you...." See, my father, see the corner of your cloak in my hand; for by the fact that I cut off the corner of your cloak, and did not kill you, you may know for certain that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you are hunting me to take my life. May the Lord judge between me and you! May the Lord avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you...When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, 'Is that your voice, my son David?' Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, 'You are more righteous than I; for you have

The image of the boy trying to walk in borrowed armour is comical, but David was confident; he was going out in the name of God. As a shepherd David practiced using his sling. He knew he was a good shot. He was not afraid.

This happened a thousand years before Jesus, yet I see parallels for us as Jesus' disciples today.

We're called to share our faith in a largely secular society, like facing a sophisticated, politically astute, technologically advanced, fierce warrior giant. Maybe we try on some armour, but it doesn't fit and stops us moving.

Like David, we have the equipment, but do we know how to use it? David had practiced long and hard, and so he had confidence.

These days we have prayer, caring for others, looking after creation, sharing resources, social justice, being radically inclusive... just some of the slingshot stones for sharing faith in 21st century life. Have we practiced enough? Are we - like David - prepared, confident and ready to go?

Prayer

Lord, help us be ready to share our faith, as we face the giants of today. All too often we don't know what to say, or can't think how to tell about the love of Jesus in a way that people outside of church can understand. So, we keep quiet. Help us be prepared, honing our skills and practicing using all the slingshot stones available. Help us go confidently and remember that you are with us always. Amen

[Wednesday 17th October David and Goliath 2](#)

Verena Walder Lay Preacher and Elder. Tabernacle URC Mumbles.

from 1 Samuel 17

The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. The Philistine said to David, 'Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?' And the Philistine cursed David

by his gods. The Philistine said to David, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.' But David said to the Philistine, 'You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand.' When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly towards the battle line to meet the Philistine. David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

Reflection

Here we find David, untrained in weapons of war, much sheltered by being the youngest member of his family. However, in his own way, what a giant he was in his trust of the Almighty God!

So easily he could have been rather proud and haughty as, dare I say, many of us were as teenagers. Instead, remembering how God had helped him as a shepherd in the fields to wield the simple sling and stone, he stuck with these things with which he was familiar. To him they were all that were needed but there was more to his simple faith than what literally met Goliath's eye. In this scene of conflict he did not forget that the battle was not his to win. He did not boast of his own prowess at defending his flock from wolf or bear attack, and how a mere giant would be a walkover. Instead his trust was totally in his God whom he knew would fight for him and therefore it was God's battle and not David's to win.

O LORD, do not delay.

Reflection

Psalms can be used in a variety of circumstances. The words of Psalm 70 with a few minor but significant changes are also found in Psalm 40:13-17. It is difficult to date the Psalms but generally Psalm 70 is considered the older. Psalm 70 uses the word Elohim, translated in the English as God in verses 1 and 4 as opposed to YHWH, 'the Lord', in Psalm 40. Psalm 70 is regarded as the lament of an individual whereas Psalm 40 is one of thanksgiving.

In the first half of the Psalm the Psalmist asks for help in face of opposition,. Unusually unlike the plea in many Psalms the Psalmist does not ask for enemies to be destroyed. The Psalmist essentially wants them to turn round and flee, rather like a retreating army.

The Psalmist goes on to reflect upon those who are faithful to God. The Psalmist urges those who seek God to rejoice and praise. The Psalmist has moved beyond personal need to pray for others. Then right at the end the Psalmist returns to the plea made at the beginning for God to make haste to save and begs God not to delay.

Psalm 70 is not long; it does not contain glorious, memorable lines but it can be applied to a variety of situations. If we use it in prayer, we may feel it does not particularly apply to us but even so we may realise the Psalm speaks to others in need of God's help, a help that needs to quickly come.

Common Worship of the Church of England in the opening responses for morning and evening prayer uses words long used in monastic worship::

O God, make speed to save us: O Lord, make haste to help us.

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for the psalmists, whose words through the ages have addressed human need and concerns. Whose words speak to our own condition, with deep sighs of lamentation, with songs of praise, with words that bring comfort in distress. We give thanks and pray for those whose concerns

With this sense of threat and betrayal firmly established in his mind, he hears only the things that affirm and confirm his outlook. He is deaf to all evidence to the contrary. As a result, Doeg's tale about David and the priests "makes sense" to him but no amount of reasoned explanation from Ahimelech makes a difference.

Saul's power and authority, when combined with his mindset, compound the negative outcomes. He becomes a terror and a tyrant, slaughtering priests. As a result, he is now at odds with his own people and he drives the sole survivor of the massacre into support for David.

Paying heed to stories because they happen to support my outlook is a widespread human trait. So is dismissing out of hand the stories that challenge my own established views. Today's tendency to inhabit silos of the like-minded in the social media world only exacerbates the problem. I need to listen carefully, especially to those who are telling me things I do not want to hear. They may be my best friends rather than my enemies. They just might prevent me misusing the power that I have in ways which hurt the innocent.

Prayer

Gracious God, encourage me to listen to others, especially when I do not like what they have to say, so that I might understand them, know myself, and hear your voice. Amen.

[Sunday 28th October Psalm 70](#)

The Rev'd David Whiting, Minister, Sunderland and Boldon URC Partnership

1 Make haste, O God, to save me;
O LORD, come to my aid.
2 May those who seek to kill me
be utterly dismayed.
May all who seek my ruin
be turned back in disgrace,
3 And may all those who mock me
with shame their steps retrace.

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4 But may all those who seek you
rejoice in you always;
May those who love salvation
say, "To our God be praise!"
5 Yet I am poor and needy;
come quickly, God, I pray.
You are my help and saviour;

Goliath may well have thought that David's words were empty and boastful but dare I say that his one fatal mistake, as it was to become, was that he had left God out of things?

God gave the victory to David who had wholeheartedly trusted only in Him, and Goliath got his just deserts, for taking the mickey out of this unworldly youngster.

What a tremendous example to us, that the only One on whom we can truly rely is the same Lord God Almighty. Let's make sure that we make Him our first choice and not our last resort!

Prayer

God our Almighty Father,
The rock of faith in whom David trusted,
Humbly we come to you to acknowledge
our need of you to help fight our battles.
May we realise that to enlist your aid is not weakness,

but like David may we forever seek your face when the going gets tough.
And as David did, may we give you the glory
knowing that you alone are the only One
who is the strength we need and the one true victor. Amen.

[Thursday 18th October David, Jonathan and Jealousy](#)

The Rev'd Andy Braunston, Minister Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton URCS

I Samuel 18: 1 - 9

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And

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all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved. As they were coming home, when David returned from killing the Philistine, the women came out of all the towns of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they made merry, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.' Saul was very angry, for this saying displeased him. He said, 'They have ascribed to David tens of thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands; what more can he have but the kingdom?' So Saul eyed David from that day on.

Reflection

It's hard to really know what's going on here. Jonathan seems to be in love with David - giving him his robes and weapons and making a covenant with him; David, of course, enjoys the attention from the king's son; his success in battle made him more popular than the temperamental king, Saul. A jealous king looks on a popular warrior who seems to be inveigling his way into the royal family playing on the affections of his son - the heir presumptive. No wonder Saul "eyed David" from that day on. As we shall see in tomorrow's reading, Saul arranges for David to marry one of his daughters, no doubt thinking he could keep a closer eye on him.

Jealousy is a powerfully dangerous emotion. It can embitter us, skew our perceptions and make us lose any sense of rationality. Coupled with jealousy Saul realised his hold on the throne was weak and that of his family becoming weaker due to David - the cuckoo in the nest. Saul, presumably, didn't know that he'd lost the support of organised religion and that its favour now fell on David. So we have a heady mix of love and jealousy, a heroic warrior and an insecure king, youthful desire and middle aged resentment.

In our own dealings with others we need to be aware of the part our emotions play. Do we find it easier to be kind and caring to those we find attractive? Does jealousy play a part in our responses to others? Are we insecure on our petty thrones, always aware that we could be deposed or do we sit securely in the role and work that God has given us?

of Jesse, none of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as he is doing today.' Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's servants, answered, 'I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech son of Ahitub; he inquired of the Lord for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.' The king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and for all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob; and all of them came to the king. Saul said, 'Listen now, son of Ahitub.' He answered, 'Here I am, my lord.' Saul said to him, 'Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, by giving him bread and a sword, and by inquiring of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as he is doing today?' Then Ahimelech answered the king, 'Who among all your servants is so faithful as David? He is the king's son-in-law, and is quick to do your bidding, and is honoured in your house. Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? By no means! Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or to any member of my father's house; for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little.' The king said, 'You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house.' The king said to the guard who stood around him, 'Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David; they knew that he fled, and did not disclose it to me.' But the servants of the king would not raise their hand to attack the priests of the Lord. Then the king said to Doeg, 'You, Doeg, turn and attack the priests.' Doeg the Edomite turned and attacked the priests; on that day he killed eighty-five who wore the linen ephod. Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; men and women, children and infants, oxen, donkeys, and sheep, he put to the sword. But one of the sons of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. David said to Abiathar, 'I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I am responsible[c] for the lives of all your father's house. Stay with me, and do not be afraid; for the one who seeks my life seeks your life; you will be safe with me.'

Reflection

Saul is in a bad place. Spear in hand, sitting under the tamarisk tree at Gibeah, his capital town, he feels threatened and knows not who to trust. He feels threatened by David and doesn't trust his own tribe or even his own son, Jonathan.

thousands, ten-fold more than Saul, so before he had even arrived in Gath, he was being judged.

How many times do we, as Christians, hide our God-given, Jesus-inspired lives simply because we want to avoid confrontation? We stand idle in the face of injustice, we stay silent in the face of inequality.

Despite this façade being put on, Achish showed hostility towards David when he became mad. (I'm surprised he didn't see right through it!). Although perhaps that's what David was after, an easy way out! It wasn't abnormal in those times to show hostility to difference.

And then, towards the end of this passage, despite his moving and escaping and fleeing. We hear of David retaining his trust in God, trust that he will be led to wherever he needs to be, whenever he needs to be.

Prayer

Loving Lord, help us to use our God-given gifts, showing them off to the world and not hiding our lights under a bushel.

Help us to trust in you, that your guiding hand may deliver us to the right place at the right time, so that Your kingdom may come and your will may be done.

Amen

[Saturday 27th October Saul's Revenge on the Priests](#)

The Rev'd Trevor Jamison, Minister, St Columba's United Reformed Church, North Shields

from 1 Samuel 22: 6 - 23

Saul heard that David and those who were with him had been located. Saul was sitting at Gibeah, under the tamarisk tree on the height, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. Saul said to his servants who stood around him, 'Hear now, you Benjaminites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? Is that why all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a league with the son

Prayer

God of love, help me to understand my emotions, and the complex reactions I have to others. Help me to be aware when I am attracted to someone, to give thanks for beauty, but to be aware of my own responses. Help me to be wise when I dislike someone, especially when I am jealous, that I may love even when I don't like the other, that I may sit securely in the work you have given me to do. Amen.

[Friday 19th October Jealousy Grows and David Marries into the Royal Family](#)
The Rev'd Peter Clark, Minister of the Bridport and Dorchester Joint Pastorate (Methodist & URC)

from 1 Samuel 18: 10-30

The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; and Saul threw the spear, for he thought, 'I will pin David to the wall.' But David eluded him twice. Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul. So Saul removed him from his presence, and made him a commander of a thousand; and David marched out and came in, leading the army. David had success in all his undertakings; for the Lord was with him. When Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in awe of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David; for it was he who marched out and came in leading them.

Then Saul said to David, 'Here is my elder daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife; only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles.' For Saul thought, 'I will not raise a hand against him; let the Philistines deal with him.' David said to Saul, 'Who am I and who are my kinsfolk, my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?' But at the time when Saul's daughter Merab should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife. Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. Saul was told, and the thing pleased him. Saul thought, 'Let me give her to him that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.' Therefore Saul said to David a second time, 'You shall now be my son-in-law.' Saul commanded his servants, 'Speak to David in private and say, "See, the king is delighted with

you, and all his servants love you; now then, become the king's son-in-law." So Saul's servants reported these words to David in private. And David said, 'Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man and of no repute?' The servants of Saul told him, 'This is what David said.' Then Saul said, 'Thus shall you say to David, "The king desires no marriage present except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged on the king's enemies."' Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. When his servants told David these words, David was well pleased to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, David rose and went, along with his men, and killed one hundred of the Philistines; and David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. Saul gave him his daughter Michal as a wife. But when Saul realised that the Lord was with David, and that Saul's daughter Michal loved him, Saul was still more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy from that time forward. Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle; and as often as they came out, David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his fame became very great.

Reflection

When I was 17 I had quite a crush on my father's secretary and was saddened when she suffered a series of mental health problems and was admitted to what we school kids knew as the 'loony bin' (and yes I am ashamed of myself now). I heard that while I was away at university, she left employment. Later, in my first job, working in that same local psychiatric hospital, I encountered her again, this time as a long-term in-patient. I was dreadfully distressed to see the effect of her now chronic illness.

I am aware that not all mental ill-health is so catastrophic but it was the moment that convinced me that I was not suited to mental health nursing and led me instead to train as a general nurse.

But I see her in my mind's eye as I read of Saul raving in his house. Reading on, we see further problems for Saul as his paranoia develops - another aspect of his mental health problems. Yes of course I am aware of the dangers of nurses (especially general nurses!) making diagnoses, but I've always thought of his having something like paranoid schizophrenia?

You and to accept Your forgiveness and help moving forward. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Friday 26th October David Flees to the Philistines](#)

Dan Morrell is the Immediate-Past Youth Assembly Moderator, member at St Andrew's, Roundhay

1 Samuel 21: 10- 22:5

David rose and fled that day from Saul; he went to King Achish of Gath. The servants of Achish said to him, 'Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands"?' David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of King Achish of Gath. So he changed his behaviour before them; he pretended to be mad when in their presence. He scratched marks on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle run down his beard. Achish said to his servants, 'Look, you see the man is mad; why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?'

David left there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; when his brothers and all his father's house heard of it, they went down there to him. Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Those who were with him numbered about four hundred. David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. He said to the king of Moab, 'Please let my father and mother come[a] to you, until I know what God will do for me.' He left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. Then the prophet Gad said to David, 'Do not remain in the stronghold; leave, and go into the land of Judah.' So David left, and went into the forest of Hereth.

Reflection

Gath is really David's second stop whilst fleeing Saul, after fleeing first to Nob yesterday (in Daily Devotion timescale). But reaching Gath we see David really trying to hide who he really is. Scared of what might happen to him if the King didn't think he was mad. A very clever technique. Quite the fall from grace from a man who's lining up to be a king. Those in Gath knew that David had killed

young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?' So the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away. Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds. David said to Ahimelech, 'Is there no spear or sword here with you? I did not bring my sword or my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.' The priest said, 'The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you will take that, take it, for there is none here except that one.' David said, 'There is none like it; give it to me.'

Reflection

This passage highlights the centrality of both love and the avoidance of sin. Ahimelech was in breach of the law in giving the consecrated bread to David as it was only supposed to be given to priests (Lev. 24:5-9). In giving it to him, Ahimelech was recognising David's need and putting this above religious ceremony, thus upholding a higher law of love. Centuries later, Jesus used this incident to illustrate that God's laws should be implemented with compassion (Mat. 12:1-8; Lk. 6:1-5).

It seems David is lying to protect himself. There may have been mitigating circumstances and a war going on but, interestingly, no one condoned him. We discover in chapter 22 that David's actions led to the deaths of 85 priests.

The Bible makes it clear that lying is wrong and that, just like other sins, it can lead to all kinds of harmful consequences, intended or otherwise.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Your greatest commandments are that we should love You and love one another. Help us to show our love in everything we say and everything we do. Help us to avoid sin. Instead, help us to come to You for guidance before we speak or act. When we do make mistakes, help us to acknowledge them before

David plays the difficult hand he is dealt with skill, diplomacy and tact but his continuing military success and ensuing popularity do continue to feed poor Saul's jealousy, undermining and destroying their relationship. What should've been a successful and triumphant partnership ultimately developed into a civil war that as well as destroying Saul, probably damaged David too.

Mental healthcare has come on in leaps and bounds since those days but tragically it is still desperately inadequate (not to mention desperately underfunded) and there are far too many lives damaged or destroyed, with family and friends as collateral damage.

Prayer

God of sanity and order;
we pray that you play your spiritual lyre of healing in those affected by the challenges of mental ill health;
we pray too for those who are affected by pity, hurt and / or helplessness because of their loved ones' conditions;
and we pray for all working in the field of mental healthcare, giving them patience, wisdom and new and effective treatments. Amen

[Saturday 20th October Saul's Children protect David](#)

The Rev'd Julian Macro, Retired Minister, Member of Verwood URC

from 1 Samuel 19: 1 - 17

Saul spoke to his son Jonathan and to all his servants about killing David. But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David. Jonathan told David, 'My father Saul is trying to kill you; therefore be on guard tomorrow morning; stay in a secret place and hide yourself. I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you; if I learn anything I will tell you.' Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him, 'The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you; for he took his life in his hand when he attacked the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against an

innocent person by killing David without cause?’ Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan; Saul swore, ‘As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death.’ So Jonathan called David and related all these things to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

Again there was war, and David went out to fight the Philistines. He launched a heavy attack on them, so that they fled before him. Then an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand, while David was playing music. Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear; but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. David fled and escaped that night.

Saul sent messengers to David’s house to keep watch over him, planning to kill him in the morning. David’s wife Michal told him, ‘If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.’ So Michal let David down through the window; he fled away and escaped. Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed; she put a net of goats’ hair on its head, and covered it with the clothes. When Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, ‘He is sick.’ Then Saul sent the messengers to see David for themselves. He said, ‘Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him.’ When the messengers came in, the idol was in the bed, with the covering of goats’ hair on its head. Saul said to Michal, ‘Why have you deceived me like this, and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?’ Michal answered Saul, ‘He said to me, “Let me go; why should I kill you?”’

Reflection

What tumultuous relationships and emotions we find in this story, characters about whom we should like to know more and so speculate, easily transferring to them our own experiences and even prejudices.

Today we read about four people, Saul, his son Jonathan, his successor David and David’s wife, Saul’s daughter Michal. We can learn from them all.

In the fuller story we learn that Saul experienced florid, ecstatic episodes, readily flying into a rage, prompted it seems by jealousy of both his son Jonathan and, in today’s passage, of David whose musical talents had often soothed Saul but whose military prowess was perceived as a threat. How

Very often, the only safe way out for them is a careful, yet desperate plan to escape abroad, often with the help of a sympathetic loved-one – just as Jonathan assisted David – but who must take precautions to protect themselves, like Jonathan’s secret signal with the arrows.

This passage is also the last recorded meeting between David and Jonathan, so it is no surprise that they wept together.

Of the 68.5 million refugees worldwide, 3.1 million are seekers of asylum [Source: UNHCR]. That is a lot of tears welling up from long-parting, often never to return.

One recurring theme across the arc of Scripture is to welcome those in need, a Biblical message that remains relevant today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You say to us: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to Me.”

Help us to become the people You call us to be. Amen.

Thursday 25th October Holy Bread

Jeff Newall is a Lay Preacher and member of Christ the Vine Community Church, Milton Keynes.

1 Samuel 21: 1 -9

David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech came trembling to meet David, and said to him, ‘Why are you alone, and no one with you?’ David said to the priest Ahimelech, ‘The king has charged me with a matter, and said to me, “No one must know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.” I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. Now then, what have you at hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here.’ The priest answered David, ‘I have no ordinary bread at hand, only holy bread—provided that the young men have kept themselves from women.’ David answered the priest, ‘Indeed, women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the

shoot.’ As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy came to the place where Jonathan’s arrow had fallen, Jonathan called after the boy and said, ‘Is the arrow not beyond you?’ Jonathan called after the boy, ‘Hurry, be quick, do not linger.’ So Jonathan’s boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master. But the boy knew nothing; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement. Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said to him, ‘Go and carry them to the city.’ As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, ‘Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, “The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.”’ He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city.

Reflection

Saul and David had originally been close (16:21), but love was replaced by jealousy. The author makes a point of David’s looks (17:42) and that he captured the heart of two of Saul’s children – Jonathan (18:1) and Michal (18:20). David seemed to be quite the catch!

But as we have read, Saul’s jealousy rose to the level of murderous intent, and Jonathan’s secret signal to David confirmed this, leaving David only one course of action – exile.

The depth of relationship between Jonathan and David is a source of inspiration and comfort to many, especially to our local church’s Metropolitan Congregation with its mission to the LGBT community, but not just for a gay interpretation of their relationship.

Over the years, we have welcomed dozens of folk seeking asylum in the UK, who, like David, suddenly found themselves in danger - even in fear of their lives - when their sexuality was discovered or disclosed. Akin to Saul’s anger, the often violent anger and rejection by family, friends and neighbours was real: many, literally, bear the scars and carry them emotionally.

difficult it is to relate to and help people who are mentally unstable; how easy it is to turn to others who are easier to support.

Jonathan could expect to be his father’s successor but was eclipsed by David with whom he developed an intense bond – a bond so strong that Jonathan was ready to defy his father to protect his friend. What a blessing it is to have the support of good friends.

David had been plucked from obscurity and had by killing the Philistine champion, Goliath, become a hero, and was therefore perceived by Saul as a threat, with good reason. Did his success and the adulation of the people turn David’s head into thinking that he could do what he wanted and get whom he wanted?

Michal initially had no say in what happened to her: Saul had previously decided that David should marry her older sister but now it was Michal’s turn. But we read that Michal loved David and saved his life; did David love her? She was but one of his many women, regarded as little more than chattels. We can hope that attitudes have changed in 3,000 years – have they?

Prayer

Most gracious God guide us and strengthen us in all our relationships to treat others as we would wish to be treated. When we have been hurt, help us to forgive: when we have hurt others, show us how we have been in the wrong so that we can be honest with you, loving God, with others and with ourselves, trusting in our Saviour, Jesus Christ: Amen.

Sunday 21st October [PSALM 69](#)

Lucy Cooke, Elder, St Andrew's URC, Monkseaton

Save me, O God,
because the mighty waters
have come up to my neck
on every side.
I sink in miry depths
without a foothold;

I am engulfed beneath
the deep floodtide.

My throat is parched;
I’m weary from my shouting;
my eyes fail, looking to my God

for aid.
For those who hate and loathe
me without reason
are more than all the hairs
upon my head.

Without a cause
my foes seek to destroy me;
I have to pay back
what I did not steal.
But as for you, O God,
you know my folly;
my guiltiness from you
I can't conceal.

May those who hope in you,
the LORD Almighty,
not be disgraced
on my account, O God;
May those who seek your face,
O God of Israel,
not suffer shame because of me,
O Lord.

For your sake, LORD,
I must endure derision;
my face is covered
with contempt and shame.
Even my brothers

Reflection

I don't think I have ever stood as close to the edge of despair, or felt as consumed by the hatred and taunts of others, as the Psalmist describes in today's Psalm. Generally, I live a fairly comfortable life. I have a loving family, employment I enjoy, enough financial resources to live comfortably and am in reasonable health. Perhaps more importantly than these creature comforts, I

do not recognise me;
to mother's sons
a stranger I became.

Because devotion to your house
consumes me,
those who insult you
turn their taunts on me;
And when I mourn
with tears of grief and fasting,
I must endure their scorn
continually.

When I, in grief and mourning,
put on sackcloth,
the people laugh at me
the whole day long.
The elders at the city gate deride me;
I am the subject of the drunkard's
song.

But, LORD, I pray in this
your time of favour:
in your great love deliver me, O God.
Save me from sinking
in the miry waters;
deliver me from those
who hate me, LORD.

our own. But there is something here, at this point in the story of Saul and Jonathan, that might remind us of moments in our own lives when we quarrelled with our parents. There may not have been spears thrown at the dinner table, but most of can remember moments of drama, stormings out, doors slammed and relationships stretched to breaking. That line about Jonathan rising from the table in fierce anger and eating no food - and those phrases about grieving and feeling disgraced - they evoke memories of our own childhood or teenage struggles as well as of our own frustrations with offspring. Saul's anger towards Jonathan, and the terrible things he says about his mother, might remind us of some of the things we have heard or said in our families, terrible things that we wish could be erased, words that wound like spears leaving hurts that are hard to heal. We might sympathise with Saul's desire to protect Jonathan (if not with his attitude to women...!), but also with Jonathan who wants the freedom to love and befriend whom he will.

The Bible is reassuringly honest about the way that love and hatred can sometimes come so close to one another. And I can imagine that even for those with the best and warmest of families, there are moments of 'rising from the table in fierce anger'. Even Jesus, it seems from the Gospel accounts, had 'moments' with his own family. And I'm sure that the parable of 'the prodigal son' comes from a deep wisdom about family brokenness and pain, but also from a deep faith in the infinite possibilities of redemptive love.

Prayer:

O God, who loves us intimately and fiercely, hold us when we rise in anger, and help us to remember with grace. Tend with your love our deepest wounds, so that we may sit around the family table in open fellowship and in hopeful love. Amen.

[Wednesday 24th October Jonathan and David's love deepens](#)

Walt Johnson, Elder, Wilbraham St Ninian's URC

1 Samuel 20: 35 - 42

In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him was a little boy. He said to the boy, 'Run and find the arrows that I

mark. Then I will send the boy, saying, “Go, find the arrows.” If I say to the boy, “Look, the arrows are on this side of you, collect them”, then you are to come, for, as the Lord lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. But if I say to the young man, “Look, the arrows are beyond you”, then go; for the Lord has sent you away. As for the matter about which you and I have spoken, the Lord is witness between you and me for ever.’

So David hid himself in the field. When the new moon came, the king sat at the feast to eat. The king sat upon his seat, as at other times, upon the seat by the wall. Jonathan stood, while Abner sat by Saul’s side; but David’s place was empty.

Saul did not say anything that day; for he thought, ‘Something has befallen him; he is not clean, surely he is not clean.’ But on the second day, the day after the new moon, David’s place was empty. And Saul said to his son Jonathan, ‘Why has the son of Jesse not come to the feast, either yesterday or today?’ Jonathan answered Saul, ‘David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem; he said, “Let me go; for our family is holding a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there. So now, if I have found favour in your sight, let me get away, and see my brothers.” For this reason he has not come to the king’s table.’

Then Saul’s anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, ‘You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die.’ Then Jonathan answered his father Saul, ‘Why should he be put to death? What has he done?’ But Saul threw his spear at him to strike him; so Jonathan knew that it was the decision of his father to put David to death. Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food on the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, and because his father had disgraced him.

Reflection

It’s not easy to identify with the characters in this saga, with fights over kingship and the wrestling for power. It seems to belong in a very different world from

am free to be myself, to express my opinions and beliefs and live my life as I choose without facing the risk of the derision, prejudice, discrimination and hatred of others being thrown in my direction. Aside perhaps from gender, there is nothing within my identity that routinely comes under attack in the society in which I live. This should surely be true for anyone living in our society today but sadly this remains a privileged position to be in and a failure to recognise and respond accordingly to that privilege is arguably tantamount to contributing to the problem. There are those within our society who come under regular attack for expressing their faith or for remaining true to other aspects of their identity. For them, the words of our Psalm will surely resonate with an added intensity?

It isn’t only a statement of despair though. Steadfast faith and a sense of endurance shine through the words, as does a certainty that praising God is the way out of the mire. For those facing despair, God’s love and the expression of what that love means, is what will bring comfort and deliverance from the raging storm. And when we find ourselves in the position of privilege, we can embody that loving support in the way we live out our lives and in our relationships with others.

Prayer

Comforting and all embracing God, shine through the darkness of despair, rescue those who face derision for expressing themselves and their faith, give us the strength to support and encourage others to raise their heads above the cries of hatred, for in the face of every challenge and confrontation, we will lift up our voices in praise to you. Amen.

[Monday 22nd October Jonathan’s Love for David grows](#)
The Rev’d Kevin Watson, Yorkshire Synod Moderator, URC

1 Samuel 20: 1 - 17

David fled from Naioth in Ramah. He came before Jonathan and said, ‘What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin against your father that he is trying to take my life?’ He said to him, ‘Perish the thought! You shall not die. My father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me; and why should my father hide this from me? Never!’ But David also swore, ‘Your father

knows well that you like me; and he thinks, “Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved.” But truly, as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, there is but a step between me and death.’ Then Jonathan said to David, ‘Whatever you say, I will do for you.’ David said to Jonathan, ‘Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal; but let me go, so that I may hide in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, “David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city; for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.” If he says, “Good!” it will be well with your servant; but if he is angry, then know that evil has been determined by him. Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a sacred covenant with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself; why should you bring me to your father?’ Jonathan said, ‘Far be it from you! If I knew that it was decided by my father that evil should come upon you, would I not tell you?’ Then David said to Jonathan, ‘Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?’ Jonathan replied to David, ‘Come, let us go out into the field.’ So they both went out into the field. Jonathan said to David, ‘By the Lord, the God of Israel! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or on the third day, if he is well disposed towards David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? But if my father intends to do you harm, the Lord do so to Jonathan, and more also, if I do not disclose it to you, and send you away, so that you may go in safety. May the Lord be with you, as he has been with my father. If I am still alive, show me the faithful love of the Lord; but if I die, never cut off your faithful love from my house, even if the Lord were to cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.’ Thus Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, ‘May the Lord seek out the enemies of David.’ Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own life.

Reflection

At a secondary school assembly I shared the lyrics of “The Friendship Test” by Tenacious D, a conversation in which one tests the friendship of the other by asking the question: “Do you love me?” The other is shocked, asking if he is gay, and whether he fancies him, and eventually can only say that he likes him. His friend declares he has failed the test, but many of us find it difficult to say “I love you.” Many show our love by our support for each other, through thick and thin, but whether by words or deeds, everyone needs to know they are loved.

Here, the beautiful story of David and Jonathan, tells of two friends who truly loved each other, a love for which they would risk their lives - with no suggestion of sexual attraction, nor bound by family ties, nor any sense of dutiful care. In that assembly I suggested that in school years they were probably making friendships which would last a lifetime, and possibly even a friendship with which they would trust their lives. That’s the kind of love Jesus calls us to share, the kind of love that Jonathan and David had, and risked their lives for each other. In the mining communities of the North East, there was a word used carefully – “marra.” Miners worked in pairs, as marras, and you had to totally trust in your marra, because how well you worked together determined how much coal was dug, but more than that, in such a dangerous environment, your life could depend upon him.

This is the selfless, self-giving love Jesus gives us and calls us to share with one another. The assembly had such an impact on students and staff, morning lessons were abandoned, and time given to explore what it meant to be a true friend. Perhaps we could do well to reflect on what that means for us marras in the body of Christ.

Prayer

Help me Lord to reflect on all my relationships, to be thankful for and appreciate all those who give themselves to me in so many ways. To be confident in myself to give away love freely. To ever be alert to opportunities, in word and deed to show others they are loved. To help everyone reach the place where they can even say “I know God loves me.” Amen

[Tuesday 23rd October Jonathan falls out with Saul](#)

The Rev’d Dr Susan Durber, Minister, Taunton United Reformed Church

1 Samuel 20: 19 - 34

Jonathan said to him, ‘Tomorrow is the new moon; you will be missed, because your place will be empty. On the day after tomorrow, you shall go a long way down; go to the place where you hid yourself earlier, and remain beside the stone there. I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a