

3rd – 8th May 2021 *Compiled by Revd Theresa Morton (Assistant Curate)*

Monday 3rd May

Psalm 118 : 1-3, 14-15

Acts 14 : 5 - 18

In today's reading from Acts, the citizens of Lystra assume Paul and Barnabas must be gods because of the great works they perform. We too can put others on a pedestal and look up to them. Is this helpful? How do we feel when we realise they are just ordinary people after all? Perhaps today ask God to help you see your own worth as his beloved child, so you don't compare yourself against others.

Tuesday 4th May

Psalm 87

Acts 14 : 19 - end

Paul and Barnabas continue their journey; they "strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith." Take some time to think about what strengthens your soul and encourages your faith. Could you make space for more of these things in your daily life?

Wednesday 5th May

Psalm 122 : 1-5

Acts 15 : 1 - 6

The apostles are having a debate about a fundamental aspect of their faith. It's easy to assume that as Christians we should all see eye to eye on everything, but of course we don't. Does this passage offer helpful approaches we can use to work through disagreements with one another today?

Thursday 6th May

Psalm 96 : 1 – 3, 7 - 10

Acts 15 : 7 - 21

Peter and James argue that through God's grace both Jews and Gentiles may be saved; there is "no distinction between them and us" (Acts 15 : 9). Think about the barriers that the Church is perceived to put up that stops some people feeling welcome. Maybe this is a good time to look at the CofE's Living in Love and Faith material, or consider a personal response to racism within the Church.

Friday 7th May

Psalm 57 : 8 - end

Acts 15 : 22 - 31

The apostles realise that some of the new Christian communities are hearing mixed messages, and that this is unsettling them, so decide to go and speak to them in person. We've probably all been confused or hurt through misunderstandings arising from poor communication. Are you in this position now, or know someone who is? Could you have a conversation with that person to sort things out? This may not be appropriate, but you can still pray for everyone involved.

Saturday 8th May

Psalm 100

Acts 16 : 1 -10

Paul's plans are thwarted. Instead of travelling where he wants to, he believes God is sending him elsewhere. Think about a time when you have felt God directing your life, or a time when you have wanted God's direction but it doesn't seem to have been forthcoming. How did this feel? What was the outcome? Perhaps pray now to feel God's hand in your life.

10th – 16th May Compiled by Claire Whitmore (Ordinand)

Monday 10th May

Psalm 149 : 1 – 5

Acts 16 : 11 - 15

If the Gospels are all about Jesus, Acts is all about the Holy Spirit. What do you see the Spirit doing here? Driving the missionary journey? Opening Lydia's heart to the Good News? Establishing the first church in Europe? What is the Holy Spirit doing in your life at the moment?

Tuesday 11th May

Psalm 138

Acts 16 : 22 - 34

Imprisonment is a repeated motif in Acts – a reminder that the world will try and confine and control the workers of God, and, as today's story shows, that God cannot be held back by the systems of this world. Paul and Silas are not the only ones freed from prison in this story though – all the prisoners find themselves unchained, and the guard, too finds himself entering into the story of God's salvation. You might like to pray for prisoners today, or to think about the ways people in your life are imprisoned, literally or metaphorically. How might you help to liberate them?

Wednesday 12th May

Psalm 148 : 1 – 2, 11 – 14

Acts 17 : 15, 22 – 18 : 1

In this passage, Paul, a devout and observant Jew, now following Christ, behaves in remarkable ways. He turns towards Athens, a city not only of Gentiles, but a city full of idol worship. Driven by the Holy Spirit, he lives out the gospel call to reach out, to touch and invite in those who are different to us. What do you say to those who are radically different to yourself? How does this encounter make you feel and react?

Thursday 13th May (Ascension Day)

Psalm 47

Acts 1 : 1 - 11

Today we jump back to the beginning of the book of Acts as we celebrate Christ's ascension into heaven. The opening of the book declares that the world has changed – Jesus, a dead man, has come back to life, spent time with his disciples, and been lifted into heaven. Life's one certainty, that all will die, has been turned on its head! It's hard to really capture just how revolutionary, how exciting, this time must have felt. We might not be able to capture exactly how it felt, but we can reflect on what excites us about the story of Jesus. You might even like to share that excitement with a friend!

Friday 14th May

Psalm 15

Acts 1 : 15 - end

Jesus' disciples are still trying to work out what has happened – Jesus died, was resurrected, and then he ascended! All enormous things to get your head around, all in the space of a few weeks. Here Peter tells a simple story of Judas's betrayal and starts the process of replacing him. He overlooks his own denial of Jesus and the other disciples who ran away in favour of a simple narrative that leaves him looking good. Are there places in your life that you are tempted to impose a simple narrative where some are good and others are bad? Might the reality be more complex?

Saturday 15th May

Psalm 47 : 1 – 2, 7 – 10

Acts 18 : 22 - 28

We're back to Paul's adventures today, and a new cast of characters: Apollos, the towering Alexandrian intellectual, and Priscilla and Aquila, introduced earlier in chapter 18, but not covered in our daily readings. Priscilla and Aquila are refugees, come to Athens to escape Roman persecution of Jews in Italy. Yet it is they, an itinerant couple who make tents for a living, who have something to teach and guide the impressive Apollos. There are many things this story might prompt us to reflect on – the power of working with others; the depth of what those who are marginalised have to teach those with power; the way the Holy Spirit guides us to play our part in God's plan.

16th – 22nd May

Please use Christian Aid's "A seven-day devotional" for this week starting on Sunday!

24th – 29th May *Compiled by Fr John Richards*

Monday 24th May

Psalm 68 : 1 – 6

Acts 19 : 1 - 8

All of us are in danger of dismissing the power of the Holy Spirit and sometimes we even neglect to acknowledge its existence in our Christian lives. Our passage of Scripture tells us of Paul teaching those first Christians at Ephesus all about possessing the Holy Spirit and allowing the Spirit to work in them. We must do the same, otherwise our faith is incomplete. Where in your life have you ignored the power of the Spirit to work in you?

Tuesday 25th May

Psalm 68 :9 – 10, 18 – 19

Acts 20 : 17 - 27

We hear St Paul's farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus. It's a great speech! He talks about many things related to his faith, and particularly about his future. He knows that there will be hardships ahead and relies on the power of the Holy Spirit to get him through and to brave everything the future might hold. It's a lesson for us. To place our problems and concerns into God's hands and to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. In our prayers let us place our future in God with complete trust.

Wednesday 26th May

Psalm 68 : 27 – 28, 32 – end Acts 20 : 28 – end

Paul continues his speech to the elders at Ephesus. He warns them of troubles ahead and tells them that fierce wolves will come among them, so they must be watchful. At the end he kneels down with them and prays. He reminds them of the words of Jesus, "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving." How do those words affect your life? What do you make of Paul's rather sad speech? Do you see a blue-print for the church?

Thursday 27th May

Psalm 16 : 1, 5 – end

Acts 22 : 30, 23 : 6 - 11

Here we see St Paul taking a great risk as he stands in front of the Sanhedrin which was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees. These two groups often argued because they had differing views on the law and its interpretation. Paul knew he was in danger, but there are times when we have to speak out. Confessing our own faith can get us into trouble. Has there been a time in your life when you have had to speak out? What do you do if someone makes racist comments? How do you handle sexist remarks?

Friday 28th May

Psalm 103 : 1 – 2, 11 – 12

Acts 25 : 13 - 21

In Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus say "you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake." Our reading from Acts shows that the prophecy has come true. Paul comes before King Agrippa and has to plead his case. Having to own up to our faith can be very difficult in certain situations. Have there been times in your life when saying you were a Christian has caused you to be ridiculed or embarrassed? If so, what did you do about it? How did you defend yourself?

Saturday 29th May

Psalm 11 : 4 – end

Acts 28 : 16 – 20, 30 - end

Here we see St Paul at the end of his days living in Rome. He was an old man and probably in considerable pain. But his faith is as strong as ever and he continues to be hospitable and to teach others about Jesus. Paul is an example to us all, however old and frail we become. Have you spoken to anyone about Jesus today? Do you keep Jesus in a box that only comes out on Sundays? Paul spoke with all boldness and freedom. Let us do the same!

31st May – 5th June *Compiled by Canon Janet Chapman (Rector)*

For the next few weeks we will be reading passages from the Old Testament; from the books of Samuel and Kings. The OT contains many genres of literature and these books can be described as history – but that doesn't mean they can't be contradictory at times, not least because there isn't one author.

We are at the point where the Hebrew people (also known as 'Israel' and later as Jews) are sort-of settled in the promised land. They have escaped from being slaves in Egypt, wandered around the wilderness for 40 years under the leadership of Moses and then entered Canaan under Joshua and have been ruled by a series of Judges including the woman Deborah. She was one of the better ones! Samuel will be the last of the Judges and, reluctantly he will appoint Saul as the first King.

Under the rule of the kings they transform from being the 12 tribes of Israel into a nation state. But for now they are somewhat pre-occupied by their current enemy, the Philistines, who have the better land near the sea but they are about to get their come-uppance. Just one of a series of skirmishes for the Hebrew people as they carve out an area where they can settle for the Promised Land wasn't empty when they arrived and the Canaanites, Amorites, Hivites, Jebusites, Girgashites and Perizzites resented their presence.

Monday 31st May

Psalm 116.10-15

1 Samuel 1 : 1 – 8

Against the above backdrop we encounter an ordinary Hebrew family who trust in God; Elkanah and his wives Hannah and Peninnah. Within the family there are tensions. Put yourself in the place of Peninnah? How does it feel to see Hannah receive double portion of the sacrifice, year after year? Then Hannah coping with her childlessness; has there been a time when you have really wanted something and someone close to you has it in abundance? And what about Elkanah? What would you be feeling and what do you do if you were in his place, year after year? Reread the psalm.

Tuesday 1st June

Psalm 113

1 Samuel 1 : 9 – 20

So the priest Eli has mistaken Hannah as being drunk rather than being in great distress. How do you come across when in distress? Have you been misjudged in this situation? Think of a time when you have seen someone behaving badly. Could they have been in distress? Thankfully God sees into the heart! Share any distress you have with him, whether for yourself or for someone else and hear Eli's words to Hannah for yourself, "Go in peace, may God grant your petition, and may you find favour in God's sight" for God is mindful of each one of us.

Wednesday 2nd June

Psalm 40 : 1-4, 7 - 10

1 Samuel 3 : 1 –20

Now Hannah had kept her promise and placed Samuel in the care of the elderly priest Eli. He had two sons of his own and the tradition was that being priest was handed down through families. BUT Eli's sons hadn't turned out well and Eli knew it. Maybe, there was hope in his adopted son, Samuel? Would you be willing to hear the word from the Lord, even though you suspected it would be uncomfortable? Do you need to say anything difficult to someone. Pray for courage and guidance to choose the best time for it to be heard (again!) "Behold, I did not restrain my lips."

Thursday 3rd June

Psalm 44 : 10-15, 24-25

1 Samuel 4 : 1 -11

Be careful what you wish for! Today we see Israel defeated not once but twice by the Philistines – and the ark of the Lord is captured. What joy there is in the Philistine camp! But not for long and if you read on you will learn that it brought them 'heaviness' and eventually they returned it. Is there something you longed for but now find heavy? Can you return it or enable it to become more of a blessing than a curse? "Rise up, O Lord. Awake and help us?" (Psalm 44 v 24 adapted)

Friday 4th June

Psalm 89 : 1-5, 15-18

1 Samuel 8 : 4-7,10-end

The years have passed by. Samuel has judged (led) Israel for some time and done it well, but like Eli, his sons have not followed his example. The people are worried for the future and want a King like the other nations around them. Samuel urges caution but the people are not persuaded. God grants their request despite the pain of the request implying that they are rejecting Him as their King. Imagine you are Samuel. What are your thoughts and feelings. "Truly the Lord is our shield: the Holy One of Israel is our King."

Saturday 5th June

Psalm 21.1-6

I Samuel 9 : 1-4, 17- into the first half verse of chapter 10.

We tend to associate donkeys in the Bible with the birth of Jesus but one isn't mentioned at that point but they do enable Saul to meet with Samuel. Saul gets more than he bargained for as he is anointed King. I wonder what he made of the experience? Could the donkeys tell the difference when he returned home? Can you remember your baptism or confirmation? These days, we anoint with oil during these rites, and also we can anoint during prayers of healing. The Queen was anointed at her coronation. What difference does it make? How would you like others to discern that you have been baptised (christened) or confirmed. "The King shall rejoice in your strength, O Lord." We give thanks for the witness of the Queen as a Christian and pray for her, especially she mourns Prince Philip. May she continue to rejoice in your strength.

7th – 12th June *Compiled by Janice Wones (Reader)*

Monday 7th June

I Samuel 15 : 16 – 23

Psalm 50 : 8 – 10, 16 – 17, 24

How are the mighty fallen? King Saul had been given a task to do by God, through Samuel. He had done what he thought was wanted. But he thought that he could improve on it by offering the best of the cattle as a sacrifice. Maybe he and his soldiers could enjoy a feast of the rest of the carcasses. Have you ever felt called to do some good task and then spoilt it by trying too hard? "To those who keep my way will I show the salvation of God."

Tuesday 8th June

I Samuel 16 : 1 -13

Psalm 89 : 19 - 27

How are the mighty fallen? Jesse and his seven sons knew that Samuel was selecting them for something special and, maybe, they also suspected what that honour was. They thought that they knew who would be most suitable. But it was the youngest, the least important son who was chosen. Have you ever thought that you were going to be selected to do something important and found that someone else was given the job? Were you disappointed? Or were you relieved? "I have set a youth above the mighty."

Wednesday 9th June

I Samuel 17 : 32 – 33, 37, 40 – 51 Psalm 144 : 1 -2, 9 - 10

How are the mighty fallen? Goliath was the supreme fighting man. He was tall and strong. He had the latest and best of warlike equipment. No wonder that no one in the Israelite army wanted to fight him. But David was able to look at him with fresh eyes. Have you ever thought that you faced an insuperable problem and then been inspired to see it from a different angle and put it into correct proportion? "You that give salvation to kings and have delivered (me), your servant."

Thursday 10th June

I Samuel 18 : 6 – 9, 19: 1 – 7

Psalm 56 : 1 – 2, 8 - end

How are the mighty fallen? Saul was overwhelmed with jealousy for his reputation as a warrior and thought that the only solution was to kill his rival. Johnathan was able to show him that David had improved Saul's reputation, rather than reducing it. Have you ever misjudged someone's actions or intentions? Were you able to realise your mistake? Or was someone else able to help you to understand your mistake? "Then shall my enemies turn back on the day when I call upon you."

Friday 11th June

1 Samuel 24 : 3 – 22a

Psalm 57 : 1 – 2, 8 - end

How are the mighty fallen? Saul has been chasing David around the country. David has been hiding, so that he would not have to confront Saul. Here was David's chance to put an end to the chase and his men expected him to take it. But David had respect for the blessing that Saul had received at his anointing and he spared him.

Have you ever felt in a position to take revenge on someone and then been glad that you refrained?

“In the shadow of your wings will I take refuge.”

Saturday 5th June

2 Samuel 1 : 1 – 4, 11 – 12, 17 – 19, 23 - end

Psalm 80 : 1 - 6

How are the mighty fallen? Saul, Jonathan had been killed and their corpses humiliated. The Israelite army had been defeated. The Philistines had occupied the Israelite towns. David laments the disaster and the death of the king and his friend.

Have you lost someone very dear to you? Or have you ever had any other overwhelming loss? Tell God sincerely how you feel.

“Turn us again, O God; show the light of your countenance and we shall be saved.”

14th – 19th June *Compiled by Fr David Pycock (Associate Priest)*

Monday 14th June

Psalm 89 : 19 - 27

2 Samuel 5 : 1 – 10

Imagine that you are one of the Jebusites living in Jerusalem. You were accustomed to leaving the city and taking your sheep into the hills, but with David King over all Israel what will happen now? How do you feel towards David being a Jebusite? Can you imagine a similar situation in your own lifetime or that of your parents? How would you have felt had Germany won the second world war? Can you imagine how those German prisoners of war who remained in this country felt after the second world war. Where do you go to find a quiet place, a place where the affairs of the world cannot intrude? If you sit by the water course then you are reminded of the way that the city was taken. Everywhere the city is being rebuilt. The streets are full of the lame and the blind. What is it like to see David grow in power as King and the former rulers imprisoned or worse? How do you feel about King David? How do you feel about modern-day leaders such as the leaders of Russia, North Korea, Brazil and elsewhere? How can you bring these feelings before God?

Tuesday 15th June

Psalm 24 : 7 - end

2 Samuel 6 : 12 - 19

Today, continue your meditation as a Jebusite in the city of David. Take a moment to locate yourself in the ancient city of David, a little time after David took over. You hear that King David is having the Ark of God brought to Jerusalem, to what King David calls the City of David. How did you feel when the trumpets are blown and the drums beaten as the Ark of God is brought into the city? Does the city still feel like your home? How did it feel to receive the bread, raisins and meat? What was it like to see King David dancing before the procession? Return to the present time. In the present time you might not have seen a modern-day ruler dancing in front of the people, in a procession. You might have seen senior politicians performing in Strictly Come Dancing, you may have seen some modern leaders in solemn procession. Are there any leaders that you think have metaphorically danced before the people? How do you feel about that? Are you able to take them seriously? Do you think all the more of them connecting with ordinary people? What in the modern day do the leaders who “dance” in public herald by their dancing?

Wednesday 16th June

Psalms 89 : 19 - 27

2 Samuel 7 : 4 - 17

Now imagine that you are a follower of King David, someone in his court. You heard that Nathan had visited David and that he had relayed a message that he should build a house for the Ark of God. Nathan also tells David that God will build a house for the King. It seems like you are in a good place, as, according to Nathan, God has promised David rest from his enemies. Can you imagine being promised such security, being promised that nothing will assail the kingdom, the country in which you live? How does it feel to be enfolded in God's love, to be protected for ever?

Thursday 17th June

Psalms 132 : 1 - 5, 11 - 15

2 Samuel 7 : 18 – 19, 24 - end

Find a quiet place to sit, perhaps light a candle. No need to imagine being in Israel, in the kingdom of David. Simply sit and count your blessings. The blessings of family, of security, of relative wealth. Do you feel that you are part of God's chosen people? What does it take for you to feel part of God's kingdom? What does it mean to be part of God's kingdom? What are the benefits that you hope to receive? Do you feel God will bless your house and your children's house? Do you feel David's relationship with God mirrored in your life?

Friday 18th June

Psalms 51 : 11 – 16

2 Samuel 11 : 1-17

This is a story that reveals David as very self-confident, appearing to feel that he can do whatever he likes. Compare David's behaviour with that of Uriah. How would you contrast them? How do you feel about David sending Uriah to his death? Consider the behaviour of modern leaders. Do they sometimes show a similar disregard for those they govern and direct? Do you sometimes feel mistreated as Uriah was, even though you are not sent to your death? How do you react to Bathsheba's behaviour? How would you feel if you were part of either David's household or Uriah's household and knew what had happened? How do you feel about Joab sending Uriah to fight on the front so that he would die? Is it ok to do this because King David commanded him, or do you feel that he should have challenged David's authority? What might Joab risk if he challenged David's authority?

Saturday 19th June

Psalms 51: 11- 16

2 Samuel 12: 1 - 17

Now we hear God's response to David's actions. Who speaks God's word to you, who is Nathan for you? Do people sometimes tell you a story and leave you to work out the implications? Today we tend to be more direct in our comments. Which approach would you prefer and why? Do you feel God anointed David King, rescued him from the hand of Saul, gave David his master's house and his wives, the house of Israel and Judah? Nathan tells David that God knows how he had Uriah killed and took Bathsheba to be his wife. Do you feel that you have ever failed to do what God asked of you? How do you know what God wanted you to do? If you wanted to do otherwise than God wanted you to do, how did you decide what to do? Did you pause to think what you should do? Nathan's message to God is stern and sets out a future that is grim. Have you ever thought that God might be disciplining you? If so, how did you know that God was not pleased? Take time to listen to God. This might take a few days or weeks but listen carefully and make notes each day. Ask God to reveal what he wishes you to know. Test what you think you hear with someone you can trust.