



March Team Ministry

March Team St John, St Mary, St Peter, St Wendreda

Welcome

Sixth Sunday of Epiphany ~ 14th January 2021

Please keep in touch with one another, and I am always glad to hear from you on 01354 279232 or at andrew.marchurch@gmail.com

The rules for Church services have not changed under this lockdown, but with the rise in infections everyone is asked to be especially vigilant. For some people a greater degree of isolating is sensible. No one should feel pressurised in to attending church

We have Church services with social distancing, and also, for the foreseeable future, our zooming, emailing and leaflet deliveries. We want people to have a genuine choice. We are also trying to allow other aspects of the church's life to happen. Ideas and suggestions welcome.

St Peter's Sundays 8am & 11am; Wednesdays 10am

St Mary's Sundays 9.15am

St John's Sundays 9.30am; Tuesdays 10am

*On Ash Wednesday, 17th February,
we will have services in St Peter's 10am and St John's 7pm.*

"Stay in touch, take care, keep safe, continue praying and God bless."

Prayers for this Week

Holy God, you sanctified this day as a time for rest and worship. As its blessed hours unfold, place on our lips canticles of praise and in our hearts the charity of Christ, that this day may be a pledge and foretaste of the eternal kingdom yet to come. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, praying for the inspiration of your Holy Spirit.

Amen

God made known in human frailty; your chosen one walked through the fields where bitterness flourished and mercy was enclosed: break through our conspiracies of unholy power and teach us what it means to save and honour life; through Jesus Christ, the lord of the Sabbath.

Amen

1 Kings 1 v15-31

Bathsheba went to the king in his room. The king was very old; Abishag the Shunammite was attending the king. Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king, and the king said, 'What do you wish?' She said to him, 'My lord, you swore to your servant by the LORD your God, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne. But now suddenly Adonijah has become king, though you, my lord the king, do not know it. He has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the children of the king, the priest Abiathar, and Joab the commander of the army; but your servant Solomon he has not invited. But you, my lord the king—the eyes of all Israel are on you to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise it will come to pass, when my lord the king sleeps with his ancestors, that my son Solomon and I will be counted offenders.'

While she was still speaking with the king, the prophet Nathan came in. The king was told, 'Here is the prophet Nathan.' When he came in before the king, he did obeisance to the king, with his face to the ground. Nathan said, 'My lord the king, have you said, "Adonijah shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne"? For today he has gone down and has sacrificed oxen, fatted cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's children, Joab the commander of the army, and the priest Abiathar, who are now eating and drinking before him, and saying, "Long live King Adonijah!" But he did not invite me, your servant, and the priest Zadok, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon. Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king and you have not let your servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?'

King David answered, 'Summon Bathsheba to me.' So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. The king swore, saying, 'As the LORD lives, who has saved my life from every adversity, as I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel, "Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne in my place", so will I do this day.' Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, 'May my lord King David live for ever!'

Gospel of St Mark 2 v23 - 3 v6

One sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Meditation

This is the last of our weeks looking at some of the women of the bible who all too often are forgotten; today, Bathsheba. There are three episodes in our bible where Bathsheba appears, the reading we are having in Church today is the last of the three, and the one where Bathsheba has the most significant role, but it is probably the least well known of the three. Again, I wonder why !?

David, whose first love was King Saul's son and heir Jonathon, first marries Saul's daughter Michal. This marriage is not a success and seems to be childless, but helps David to be seen as a serious candidate for the throne, alongside his heroic military exploits. Whilst he is in rebellion against Saul he has six sons by six different wives, and once he becomes the undisputed King and has conquered Jerusalem, he has nine other sons by various wives in addition to his sons by his 'concubines' (2nd class wives).

Let's stop there, for a moment. In today's terms you might see David as a serial adulterer, womaniser, sexual predator and a safeguarding risk. But in the terms of the times when our accounts were compiled, this would show that he was a monarch of some standing and consequence. So we could say we are meant to be impressed by his fertility and virility, and you could also say that when we are reflecting on sexual and human relationships today, we need to be careful about taking biblical texts simplistically, out of context, or legalistically.

David has conquered Jerusalem, made it his capital, which has huge significance for the rest of Israel's history. He builds a palace, the highest building in the city, from where he can look down on all other buildings. He spies a beautiful woman bathing on her roof top. She is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Bathsheba is the granddaughter of one of David's long term bodyguards who go back to the time when they were rebels in the desert. Uriah is a foreigner, a mercenary, a soldier in David's army, who has married well. David wants Bathsheba, and as a King expects to get his way. He gets her, and she becomes pregnant. David then tries and fails to get Uriah to have sex with Bathsheba so he may be conned into believing the child is his. Next David uses his power to ensure that the soldier Uriah is placed in the thickest of the fighting and so killed. David then takes Bathsheba in.

God now appears in the account, sending his prophet Nathan so that David will be confronted by his corruption. Nathan does this by telling a tale about a rich man who stole his poor neighbour's one and only lamb; David then is invited to make the connection with his own conduct, and to stand condemned and penitent. However, this brings us to the second Bathsheba story. For the baby is taken ill so David prays for the child and fasts and is utterly miserable for it seems that his conduct is bringing this tragedy. The baby dies, and David immediately appears restored explaining whist the baby was ill he prayed and fasted for God's grace, but now nothing will bring the child back. Bathsheba then goes on to conceive Solomon.

Again, standing back for a moment, here we see God involved in the events. God seems to punish those who have abused their power, brings things into the open, and relents when people are penitent. But, nevertheless, abusive actions do have consequences. But we also may wonder what sort of God would punish someone through the death of their child, or leave a tragic legacy for future generations, and how this picture relates to the revelation of God we have in Jesus Christ.

Now we come to today's reading, the third story. David is old and dying, and the rivalry for succession has begun. There is lots of plotting by the Royal Family and courtiers. In the end David makes it clear that it is his and Bathsheba's son Solomon who shall succeed, but crucially it is because he has the support of the two religious figures who can discern God's intention; the prophet Nathan and the High Priest Zadok. As is often the case, history is recorded by the victors, so this is portrayed as God's will, but actually we only have Bathsheba's word for David's intentions.

We have witnessed the odd events concerning the handover of power in Washington. We may be scandalised by Trump's behaviour. On the other hand, we have also heard voices that imply that God somehow is using Trump against the powers of darkness. Over the years we have also learnt of plans and plots in the corridors of power, when sometimes the driving forces are personal ambition, power games, ideological passion, and even fear. We can see some people with various combinations of right/wrong; sincere/deluded; egotistical/altruistic. But is there a place for seeing God in this?

The key people who hold David to account are prophet and priest. They check his power, his secrecy, his manipulation, in such a way that he has to acknowledge his faults. It is a political system completely unlike modern western democracy, but the human and power issues are comparable. The outcome is King Solomon, Bathsheba's son, who becomes noted for his wisdom and judgement. More significantly he is the King whose greatest achievement is to build the Temple, so acknowledging the place of God in society. Solomon is criticised for having too many wives, especially foreign ones, but as we have heard, in the last weeks, in the greater narrative, Tamar and Ruth both were foreign ancestors of King David. Bathsheba is one of King David's wives, the one who provides him with his heir, Solomon.

So the voices and stories of these women, too often ignored, suppressed or marginalised, are needed for the fullness of God's revelation and provide the keys to wrestling with our faith tradition, and its connection with the debates and issues of today.

Blessed are they amongst women!

(See 1 Samuel 11 & 12 1 Chronicles 3 as well as 1 Kings 1)

God bless, Andrew

Prayers

We come to the end of our series about some of the women in the Bible who too often have been overlooked.

We are used to language of "men" and "he" representing all people, here "woman" and "she" are used inclusively the other way round.

God, take my mind and think through it; take my lips and speak through them;
take my heart and set it on fire with love for you and for your people;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to
her by the Lord. **Blessed are you among women.**

May we speak with the voice of the voiceless and give courage to those in des-
pair. **Blessed are you among women.**

May we feed the hungry of mind and heart, and send away satisfied those who
are empty. **Blessed are you among women.**

May we be strong to confront injustice, and powerful to rebuke the arrogant.
Blessed are you among women.

May we not be alone, but find support in your struggle and find sisters to rejoice
with you. **Blessed are you among women.**

May your vision be fulfilled, in company with us; may you have brothers on your
journey. **Blessed are you among women.**

Blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to
her by the Lord. **Blessed are you among women.**

We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord
and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

We welcome each other as fellow servants in the gospel:
may Christ dwell in our hearts through faith,
that we may be rooted and grounded in love.

May God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love, defend you on eve-
ry side, and guide you in truth and peace, take your heart and set it on fire with
love for God and for His people; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen