**Encounters as David departs Jerusalem** 2/7/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 15:13-16:14, Psalm 7

Text: 2Samuel 15:19-16:14

Psalms: 126, 7:9-17, 3, 72old

‘Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. You are good and do good; teach me your statues’ (Ps 119:67, 68). These words are most applicable to the time in David’s life that we are reflecting on today. When his son Absalom rebelled and organised a coup, David fled the palace and the city from which he ruled Israel. David knew his son’s rebellion was partly his fault. Since his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, David had ‘gone into his shell’, and even turned away from the Lord.

Before this sin he was loved by the people of Israel, and feared by Israel’s enemies. He had brought the Ark of the Covenant up and put it in the tabernacle set up in the city; worship was re-established in Israel. His sin, and the consequences of his sin, left him ineffective as a father and a king. Although he repented when challenged by the prophet, he became passive, even impotent, as a father and as a king. He was not engaging in prayer or calling upon the prophet of God, but was listening to a wise woman from Tekoa!

David spent his early years on the run from King Saul, but even then we did not see him barefoot and weeping (15:30). Of course, he was much older now, but sadly no wiser. Yet we sense a re-commitment to the Lord as ‘affliction’ at the hands of his son forces him to flee the palace for the wilderness. While his own son rises up against him, many remain loyal to him, especially foreigners. A man from the house of Saul takes opportunity to gloat over David’s downfall; a scene reflected in Psalm 7. If the Lord is powerful to humble a king, he is powerful to humble you and me. Our subheadings are: ‘Loyal foreigner, Levite and advisor’, ‘Opportunistic servant’, and ‘Cursing Shimei’.

**1a.Loyal foreigner**

When David heard from an informant that the ‘hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom’ (15:13), and that he was ready to march on the capital, David knew he had to act quickly. His days of doing nothing were over. Still, there is no mention of prayer or the prophet of God. David would have been able to defend the city but wanted to avoid more bloodshed within his family and in Israel, so he fled. He was again making decisions and taking action, and doing so in a hurry. The only people left behind in the palace were ten concubines (15:16). All David’s servants or royal guard passed before him as he stood at the gate. These were mostly foreign mercenaries, six hundred of them coming from the Philistine city of Gath- the Gittites.

The leader of the Gittites was man called Ittai, Ittai the Gittite (15:19). As he passed by David questioned him as to why he was going with him and not staying with ‘the king’ (15:19), as in Absalom; did David think this was the end of his reign? David tried to discourage Ittai, a refugee who had only recently joined David’s forces; he didn’t want him to become a refugee again. David gave him his blessing to return, ‘Mercy and truth to you’, but Ittai would not be dissuaded from following David. He took an oath in the name of Yahweh, and of the king, pledging to follow David even if it meant death; had he became a follower of Yahweh? David blessing was actually in covenant terms.

The loyalty of this foreigner stands in contrast to the disloyalty of his own son. Family blood ties are strong but covenant blood ties are even stronger; remember Jonathan. We also recall Ruth and her response to Naomi: ‘Where you go I will go… and your God will be my God’ (Ruth 1:16). David had no answer to such loyalty. Indeed he must have been deeply touched by Ittai’s words, and actions. He told Ittai to go ahead and cross over the Kidron Valley that lay immediately to the east of Jerusalem. With Ittai were some six hundred men and their families. David soon followed all the people across the Kidron as they headed into the country. As the people watched they ‘wept with a loud voice’ (15:23), dismayed at what was happening to their king.

**1b.Loyal Levites**

Also fleeing the city before Absalom arrived were the Levites or priests, Zadok and Abiathar in particular. They had taken the Ark of the covenant out of the tabernacle and set it down as the people crossed over from the city (15:24); a scene not unlike that of Joshua crossing the Jordan to come into Canaan (Josh 3:14-17), except David was leaving! We are also reminded of the time when the people took the ark of God with them to battle, but far from helping them defeat the Philistines, the ark was captured (1Sam 4:17).

The ark symbolised God’s presence among his people but was not to be manipulated like a pagan idol. It belonged in the most holy place of the tabernacle, something David understood. Just because he was leaving Jerusalem did not mean the Lord was leaving. The nation of Israel was bigger than David! All political leaders, and church leaders, should remember this; the church of God is bigger than any individual minister or elder.

David told Zadok to take the ark of God back into the city as he committed his future into the hands of the Lord. Realising that his future was in the hands of the Lord, David humbled himself before the Lord. If the Lord was pleased with him he would bring him back, but if not then let the Lord be praised. The Lord always does what is best for those whom he calls and who love him, be they prince or pauper (Rom 8:28).

While sending Zadok back with the ark of God, David said, ‘Are you not a seer?’ (15:27). A seer was a prophet but the priest with the Urim and Thummin was like a prophet. There may also be a play on words here- Zadok and Abiathar were to be the eyes and ears of David back in Jerusalem, sending him updates through their sons (15:28). Information about the enemy and his tactics is critical in any battle, not least in our spiritual battle against Satan. By his word and his Spirit, the Lord informs us of Satan’s tactics. So listen to God’s word or you will unprepared for the attacks of Satan upon your soul.

Having crossed the Kidron, David continued up the Mount of Olives, surrounded by many loyal servants. The picture is one of despair, of helplessness and humility. David and his servants went up weeping and with their heads covered like mourners at a funeral, and he was barefoot (15:30). The king of Israel wearing no shoes- what humility! Many years later the ‘greater Son of David’ would be led out to the city stripped of his robes and wearing a crown of thorns, with the women of Jerusalem weeping and lamenting him (Luke 23:27,28). The night before he would be on the Mount of Olives praying to his Father in heaven with sweat like ‘great drops of blood’ (Luke 23:44).

David cried out to the Lord in prayer as he went up the mountain (15:31). It has been a long time since we heard David in prayer! Affliction was having its effect, its divinely designed and desired effect; David was again praying to the Lord. David was told that Ahithophel, his former advisor, had betrayed him. He asked the Lord to turn Ahithophel’s advice into foolishness (15:31). Realising he could do nothing, David asked the Lord for help. What he wanted was something he could not do anyway, namely turn a man’s advice into foolishness. We will see how the Lord answered David’s prayer in the next chapter. Do you see the Lord’s answering your prayers? Are you not praying that the Lord confuse the wicked today? Do you not think he is answering such prayers when you see wicked social movements and political campaigns self-destruct?

**1c. Loyal Hushai**

On the top of the mountain was a place where people paused to worship God. At this place David was met by Hushai, Hushai the Archite (15:32). He came in mourning to meet David. He is called ‘David’s friend’ (15:37), a loyal friend and counsellor as it turns out, from a place down from Bethel (Josh 16:2). His name in Hebrew sounds like the word for ‘quick’ or ‘hasten’; one writer calls him ‘Speedy the Prolonger’. His advice will prolong Absalom’s pursuit of David.

David encouraged Hushai to return to Jerusalem rather than flee with him. Just how he would be a burden is not clear, but David clearly saw how he could help him by returning to Jerusalem and showing loyalty to Absalom. Servants of the king normally showed allegiance to the kings’ son, although Absalom could hardly expect any such transfer of allegiance; Ahithophel was a special case. So David asked Hushai to return to the city, along with Zadok and Abiathar the priests. He should show allegiance to Absalom and hopefully give advice to counter that of Ahithophel (15:34). Again he, like the two priests, had the two sons of the priests to send to David whenever they had intelligence to share (15:36). Hushai got back to Jerusalem just before Absalom arrived.

**2. Opportunistic servant**

As David fled the city he was encouraged by various servants or officials, namely Ittai the Gittite who vowed never to leave David, two priests Zadok and Abiathar who David sent back with the Ark of the Covenant, and Hushai the Archite, an advisor who David also sent back. David crossed the Kidron and went up the Mount of Olives barefoot and weeping. The shock of his son’s rebellion, and of leaving his home and his throne, had the positive effect of finding out who were his true friends, and of driving David back into the arms of the Lord. Another servant called Ziba appears more opportunistic than loyal.

We have met Ziba before (9:2). As a servant of King Saul, he ended up looking after the crippled son of Jonathan called Mephibosheth. When David had established peace in the land, and before he lusted after Bathsheba, he sought out Saul’s grandson and brought him to live and eat with him in his palace. David told Ziba to work the land inherited by Mephibosheth. Did Ziba want a bit more recognition than this?

Ziba appears on the scene as David passes the top of the mountain. He had come to meet David with a couple of donkeys loaded down with supplies- bread, figs, raisins, and a skin of wine (16:1). David was surprised, and maybe a bit suspicious; after all, Ziba was Saul’s servant. But Ziba assured David everything he had was for David, and David accepted the gifts with gratitude.

David went on to ask about Mephibosheth. Ziba told David that he was staying in Jerusalem; he was a cripple after all! He also told David that Mephibosheth stayed because he was hoping the people would recognise him as the rightful heir in the line of Saul (16:3). Subsequent events, and words from Mephibosheth himself, cast doubt on the veracity of Ziba’s information. But David believed him, and tells Ziba, ‘all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours’ (16:4). Ziba was overjoyed as he humbly bowed before David declaring, ‘My lord, O king!’ (16:4); we did not see such exuberance when he was told to look after the farm for Mephibosheth (9:11).

**3. Cursing Shimei**

Going down the other side of the mountain, David and his fellow refuges came to Bahurim where he was met by man from the house of Saul called Shimei. Shimei came out cursing David and throwing stones at him. Talk about kicking a man when he is down! Even though David was ‘down’ he was not ‘out’; he had Ittai’s six hundred Gittites around him, not to mention his regular army led by Joab, or in this case his brother Abishai. Shimei called David a bloodthirsty man and ‘son of Belial’ (16:7). He saw David’s troubles as being God’s repayment for all the blood that he had shed in taking the throne from Saul’s family. In truth David had not killed anyone from Saul’s family in ascending to the throne.

Despite Shimei’s accusations and violent anger, David does not confront him. He actually stops Abishai from taking off his head, and suggests that Shimei is cursing him because the Lord told him to (16:10, 11). Have you ever thought the Lord might be speaking to you when someone criticises or even curses you? This sounds a lot like the ‘old’, as in young David who refused to harm Saul because, ‘vengeance belongs to the Lord’. David asks that the Lord look upon him and his affliction, and repay him with good in place of cursing (16:12). Psalm 7 reflects David’s prayer at this time.

David’s mercy towards Shimei did not change his behaviour. Did he know how close he came to losing his head! As David went down the road towards the Jordan, Shimei kept up his cursing and throwing stones. It was a different story when later on David headed back to Jerusalem. Shimei confessed his sin and again David stopped Abishai from exacting revenge (19:23). How gracious of David! How gracious of Jesus who forgives your sin when you repent and seek forgiveness.