

## Evening Worship – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> November

### Readings and Sermon

#### Old Testament Reading - 1 Kings 1:15-40

15 So Bathsheba went to the king in his room. The king was very old; Abishag the Shunammite was attending the king. <sup>16</sup>Bathsheba bowed and did obeisance to the king, and the king said, 'What do you wish?' <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>But now suddenly Adonijah has become king, though you, my lord the king, do not know it. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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.'

22 While she was still speaking with the king, the prophet Nathan came in. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>Nathan said, 'My lord the king, have you said, "Adonijah shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne"? <sup>25</sup>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!" <sup>26</sup>But he did not invite me, your servant, and the priest Zadok, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon. <sup>27</sup>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?'

28 King David answered, 'Summon Bathsheba to me.' So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. <sup>29</sup>The king swore, saying, 'As the LORD lives, who has saved my life from every adversity, <sup>30</sup>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.' <sup>31</sup>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!'

32 King David said, 'Summon to me the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.' When they came before the king, <sup>33</sup>the king said to them, 'Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. <sup>34</sup>There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, "Long live King Solomon!" <sup>35</sup>You shall go up following him. Let him enter and sit on my throne; he shall be king in my place; for I have appointed him to

be ruler over Israel and over Judah.’ <sup>36</sup>Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, ‘Amen! May the LORD, the God of my lord the king, so ordain. <sup>37</sup>As the LORD has been with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David.’

<sup>38</sup> So the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, went down and had Solomon ride on King David’s mule, and led him to Gihon. <sup>39</sup>There the priest Zadok took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ <sup>40</sup>And all the people went up following him, playing on pipes and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth quaked at their noise.

## **New Testament Reading - Revelation 1:14-18**

<sup>14</sup>His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup>his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. <sup>16</sup>In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

<sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup>and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

## **Sermon - Past, present and future.....?**

Evensong scripture readings for this Sunday (15<sup>th</sup> November) all resonate with our current global situation, and so, together, highlights some parallels with the particular times we are in just now.

Our Old Testament reading (1 Kings 1:15-40) is set around the struggle for the succession to King David, with rival camps for Adonijah and Solomon making a play for the throne. The matter was settled by the word of the old King David, and so Solomon reigned. In the USA at the moment confrontations for presidential power have been raging, and the future may well be a revelation yet to be seen.

Our New Testament extract (Revelation 1:14-18) is very much concerned with a future, too, as John tries to describe a world beyond the present, in the context of the Jewish understanding that time was divided into two ages – the present which was beyond redemption, and the future, the age to come, God’s golden age of peace, prosperity and righteousness that would vindicate the people’s right to be known as the people of God. Our present times, if not beyond redemption, are certainly experiences that we want to displace by a better age, and we must hope that all that is going on at present to

overcome the Covid virus will prevail, so that a vision of a new age can be seen and realised.

And then we have Psalm 98:19-29, which focuses on the past, on God's covenant with David, a scene-setter as it were for unhappy present times, and an entreaty for better times to come.

So, taking tonight's scripture as a whole we are compelled to consider time, ages, eras, in terms of past, present and future. At this time of the year we pause to look back, with All Souls, All Saints, and Remembrance etc. Important as it is to remember with thanks and gratitude the saints, redeemers and guardians who have gone before, it is also vital that we can have visions of a future that is worth striving for.

Tom Wright, theologian, professor and a former Bishop of Durham, has written a book entitled 'God and the Pandemic', and earlier Brenda Holden had kindly offered to lead a reading and discussion group which would have effectively looked at the obvious question '*Why does God let things like this happen?*' Sadly, the Covid restrictions themselves have prevented the group from forming, but that should not detract any of us from reading the book.

Early on, Wright takes us back to the pagan world of Greece and Rome, when thinkers and observers basically came from one of three categories: Stoics, who believed that everything was pre-destined, and couldn't be changed; the Epicureans who believed that everything is random, so you couldn't do anything more than put up with it; and the Platonists, who looked on present life as a shadow of reality, to be replaced by the destiny of a different world.

Any of these classical approaches may produce excuses for doing nothing, an inertia that, however, may be awoken to feed an increasingly common reaction today to find someone to blame. The consequences of the pandemic produce any number of issues that could potentially be laid at someone's door, but merely to find a scapegoat now for something that had happened in the past, cannot usefully contribute to providing solutions for the future.

Historians record the past, prophets look at the present, and visionaries see the future, and so, in the context of the pandemic, Tom Wright examines where we go from here. He acknowledges that there is a place for lament, not just feeling sorry for ourselves, but understanding the nature of grief for what has happened, as part of love. This is part of living through the present, which as Christians we should do in the context of talking about God in an increasingly secular society, trying to understand how Jesus acknowledges opposing views and attitudes.

And the crunch question for Tom Wright, and all of us, is '*How do we recover?*' He looks at different imperatives, and considers possible initiatives and outcomes. Some are 'no-brainers' some are inevitable, and some will only succeed if everyone has a common sense of determination to make them work.

We could sum up our response to that question in one word – *'faith'* or perhaps *'hope'*, but either way faith anchors hope for us in the context of Christian teaching. So, all that we learn, all that we believe, all that we can share with each other, should be used to uphold the fundamental desire to prevail as equal citizens of this world and God's Kingdom, in homage to him, and with integrity as stewards of his gifts of creation to us.

A duty, a responsibility, of course, but understand that it is essential that we all make a positive response, however we can, to declare that God is with us, and has faith in us. So he is asking us, as Christ's disciples, to respond faithfully, hopefully, confident in the future that John's Revelation puts before us.

Alan Jenkins, LLM

Brenda has kindly made her discussion course on 'God and the Pandemic' available in notes to use at home. Please contact Vicky for them – [stjameswe.vicar@gmail.com](mailto:stjameswe.vicar@gmail.com).