

Morningside

26/3/2017

1 Samuel 16: 1-13. John 10: 11-18

David and Jesus. The shepherd king.

Do you enjoy “Who do you think you are?”? There has been a surge of interest in genealogy, and the tv programme came just at the right time to tap into it. I am certain that there will be people here this morning who have traced their family trees back for a very long time. Outsiders think the thrill is the possibility of striking gold: but for so many it is the actual process of the search, whether it produces millionaires or swindlers, it is the chase which is fascinating. And people do say that finding out about your ancestry does give you a stronger sense of who you are.

If you enjoy family trees then you might have been a hobbit. It is the chief intellectual pursuit of Middle Earth: Lord of the Rings devotees will tell you exactly how the Sackville-Bagginses are related to the mainstream Baggins family. Or, if not a hobbit, you might have been a Bible writer. Do you remember these never-ending genealogical lists which are impossible to read through – all the “begat” passages? Family trees are really important to the Bible writers. So it is no surprise that they do it with Jesus.

St Matthew and St Luke both set out in their gospels family trees of Jesus. They are not the same: but they both have the same purpose. Even though the details are different they are designed to prove that Jesus is a direct descendant of David. “The angels sang to the shepherds at Bethlehem *To you in David’s town this day is born of David’s line the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*

Matthew and Luke take a lot of trouble right from the start to demonstrate their conviction that Jesus could trace his ancestry all the way back a thousand years to David. What’s the point? What is so special about David and his family? What does this genealogy add to the story of Jesus?

It began with the story we read this morning. Old Samuel goes on a scandalous mission to Bethlehem. He has been told by God to find the man whom God has chosen and anoint him king. This is a scandalous mission, for there already is a king. Samuel is scared: it is not so long ago that Samuel himself at God's command has anointed Saul as king. But it seems that Saul is being passed over and Samuel comes to Jesse and his sons to find the one. Surely it will be the eldest, a fine big fellow. No. Or the second, a fine big fellow. No. Samuel is looking for the wrong signs, so God gives him advice (words we heard last week as well) *the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.* So sons three, four, five, and six are rejected, and only the wee one is left. This is the shepherd boy, David. And when he appears, Samuel hears the words *This is the one.* This is the one, chosen by God, to be The King.

David's next appearance is with the giant Philistine warrior, Goliath. This monster of a man has challenged the armies of Israel to find a man who will face him in combat, man to man. And who appears but the shepherd boy? Do you know "The Glasgow Bible", by my late friend Jamie Stuart. Here is how the story goes.

*Goliath, the big man, dauners up tae Davie an looks him up an doon. The he raps oan his shield wi the end o' his spear. "Are **you** the best they've got?" he sneers. "Weel, come oan then, ya scrawny plook. By ma ain God, Dagon, ah'll cut ye up for the sparras!" "No wey, big man" Davie pipes up, "it's your body that'll go to the birds. For I come in the name o' Israel's God an he'll gie me the upper haun the day"*

And the rest is history. History indeed is what David makes. He charms Saul with his music and becomes the favourite at court. Then, when all goes wrong for Saul, David becomes the king, the very thing Samuel had anointed him for. And not just any king, he becomes the ideal king and the idealized king, looked back for ever after by generation after generation as Israel's greatest king; under whom Israel lived its most glorious days.

The story goes that he summed up his own life near the end of it all, David's own life of great heights and great depths, by picking up the lyre again, the musical instrument which had set him on the road to kingship, and remembering the days of his youth on the slopes of Bethlehem, and composing and singing one of the Bible's greatest poems

The Lord's my shepherd I'll not want

He makes me down to lie

In pastures green he leadeth me

The quiet waters by.

It was after King David they hankered when they were invaded and defeated and carried off to exile and reduced to a poor and shabby remnant of a nation. Some day, they dreamed, God will intervene. All will be made right, and the one who will make it right will be a descendant of David. Of the royal line, born to restore the glory, the Messiah.

Now you understand the importance of the family trees. Those genealogical lists with which Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels. For their great claim about Jesus the Messiah to ring true he had to be, had to be a descendant of David. So for those readers, who cared a great deal about family history, here was the proof. And he was born at Bethlehem, for goodness sake. David's own town, where the shepherd boy grew up. To you in David's town this day is born of David's line.

When Jesus calls himself a shepherd, the good shepherd, of course he is thinking of the 23rd Psalm. Of course he was thinking of the qualities of a good shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep. But he was also thinking of the shepherd king. It is a declaration about himself and his destiny. "Here I am, great David's greater Son". Jesus the Messiah.

Of course Shepherd can be a much more comfortable title than king for us to concentrate on. I am not now thinking of constitutional questions. I am thinking of how we live our lives. Lovely to choose to be a friend of Jesus the Shepherd, who wants to look after us and keep us safe. And all too easy to forget that this is not merely the shepherd, but the shepherd king. And what

he asks from us is our obedience. When Jesus says “love God and love your neighbor” he does not say “here is something worth thinking about” He says “Love God and love your neighbor. There is a will to be done and a there is one to be obeyed. Jesus the king, to rule over our lives. To rule over your life.

There is an antique ship in Gatehouse of Fleet which has an unusual decoration on its wall. For this shop used to be a church, and on its wall still are memorial tablets. One of them moves me very much. It is a memorial tablet to a minister, one who walked out of St Andrew’s Church in George Street, the building where I used to be minister, in the Great Disruption of 1843. The issues of that historic moment, of that split in the Church of Scotland, are largely forgotten now: but to those who took part in the struggle – on both sides – the issue was clear. The issue was how to be obedient to Christ the King. On that memorial tablet it says *He cast his lot with the faithful brethren who preferred the endurance of their master’s cross to the practical denial of their master’s crown, and with them left with the testimony of a good conscience and the treasure of an unsullied reputation.*

It’s that phrase “the practical denial of their master’s crown”. The practical denial of their master’s crown. It is about time for all us disobedient ones to repent; and to renew our obedience. Then we may prepare for Easter, and the dying and rising again of great David’s greater Son.