

Sermon 5 July 2015 'What We Accomplish'
2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 Mark 6:1-13

Prayer: Merciful God, when we experience discomfort, weakness or rejection, help us remember not only your power and might but your loving compassion. Grant us courage and faith to continue the following of your way that what we accomplish is what you want for us and our world. Amen.

Funerals are sad enough – without the added reflection that it took going to someone's funeral to hear what they had accomplished in life. Granted we are quick to comment if we think someone is boasting about their accomplishments; but in my experience those people are few in number and usually I discover a reason why they need to tell their story. The ones that make me sad are those who have done fascinating things – had wonderful ministry expressions and 'forget' to share / are too shy to share / don't want to be seen to be boasting / don't think anyone is interested... ->

We have all manner of reasons and in the end the community loses part of its heritage, part of its wisdom, part of its courage for the 'now' **and hope** for the future because the full story is not shared. I don't know the answer, but I do know there are times, **and times** when we are still alive (!) when we need to share what we have accomplished!

Today we have two stories of accomplishment. David's successful uniting of the tribes of Israel into a functioning Kingdom but there are **some dark threads** running through this accomplishment which we will explore a little. And Jesus accomplishment in succeeding the first part of the disciples training and sending them out on the second and again there are some dark threads running through this as well.

As I *thought* about the 'dark threads' it made me reflect on what **we do** to a story, when there is a difference between what we would 'like' it to be and what happens. Most times we easily keep the two close, but all this does is make it hard for us when there is a real difference. Today there is real difference between what we would 'like' and what is actually there, so it becomes a question of how we live with it!

Let me talk about David. Remember last week we had the death of Saul and Jonathan and David assuming control of the kingdom. This week the verses imply everyone was happy... but actually this period is marked with bloodshed and civil war. One of Saul's *other* son's, Ishbaal is crowned king of Israel (2 Samuel 2) by General Abner. Unfortunately for Ishbaal, Abner switches sides to David; then Ishbaal is killed by two of his captains and Israel loses hope of independence and submits to David. David achieves success – he accomplishes unification!

Each version has its own difficulties, ^{*1}Remember the lectionary presentation is smooth, seamless and bloodless. David seems to effortlessly become king, **with God's blessing**. There are no moral problems facing him or about him and his choices and God's favour is all-powerful. These readings suggest that God's favour is obvious, and that is why there is this sort of effortless succession. In line with my earlier comments this makes this version what the writer **would 'like' to say** about David's accomplishments - but scripture also records 'the darker' parts about the bloodshed, betrayal, murder...

I would like to think that God allows difference – and knows how much it creates discomfort for us because of our default strategy to smooth over 'darker' parts of life. An easy transition of power because of God's blessing presents huge difficulties for anyone not aware of the 'other' version and who is facing a struggle because the 'smooth' version implies God is not blessing their work / their accomplishment, therefore they are lacking / defective somehow and not 'in favour with God'.

In real time – real life smooth transitions (life) rarely happen and we are helped in our spiritual life and maturing when we can acknowledge that struggle and hard work and persevering to get to where we believe we are being called is the right path to be on **and all this does not mean** we are faith failures,

*1HWallace, *2J Petty,

defective or that God has left us. Paul, in another reading today has some of what I keep as the most encouraging words of faith available to us.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9 He writes of a conversation he is having with the Lord. So it is Jesus speaking to Paul: **9** But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power** is made perfect in weakness." Therefore {says Paul} I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. **10** That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." *So as hard* as it is for us, what we discover by faith is that when things are hard – **Christ** provides the strength and power to keep going. cV

Hymns have a power we often forget. They are incredible faith bearers and truth holders and there is an old one by George Rawson (1807 – 1889). "The Lord hath yet more light and truth, to break forth from His Word.' And in younger days I failed to appreciate the wisdom of this opening sentence! But as I read the Gospel for today and came to the end sentences I was freshly reminded as I saw them in a new light and *therefore received* a new truth. Jesus send out the disciples and the closing instructions are that if the houses they go to *are not safe* ^{*2} because the people there would neither "receive" nor "hear" them. Then the disciples are to "shake off the dust under the feet as a witness against them."

The fresh light / new truth for me this week is that by doing this, ^{*2}opponents of Jesus movement / way are not to be fought. Rather, the Jesus movement avoids them and **leaves them to their own devices**-- "shake off the dust"-- lets it be known that they are opponents--"witness against them." And this has the effect of isolating whatever opposition there might have been, while keeping the movement positive and going forward. I was encouraged – I hope you are! In this struggle it is not our fight, walking away is usually interpreted as a weakness, *usually interpreted* as our failure, but with today's new light, it is a truth from Christ that **what we have to do** is keep going, **is to accomplish** what we've been sent to do--where we can and leave the rest to Christ.

So what does he send his disciples out to accomplish? It is not easy reading in our times even if we do like the first part! Jesus first called his disciples to be with him- to learn, live, and absorb his teachings. **And then** he sent them out with two tasks: 1. To proclaim the message; His message, his good news. 2. To have authority to cast out demons. To heal, bring salvation, restore wholeness to individuals and community. The scholar ^{*2}J Petty argues this means "they were called, in other words, to constitute a "new community" that had a specific mission. They have already done the first part of the mission--"to be with him"--and now turn to their second purpose, which is to be "sent" and "have authority over the unclean spirits." They were to go to safe houses, share, heal and build **and if not received – to move on**.

Moving on to accomplish what was required of them exactly like Jesus, because that's what the first part of our gospel reading tells us he was doing. We like to think that for the most part things were pretty easy for him but today *yet again* he is rejected – by his home town community. As the text reads it becomes a two way issue – he scandalises them by doing what he was sent to do and they offend him by not accepting his offering of The Good News of life in God's name. cV

Our life always had dark threads running with the bright ones, threads of pain and rejection, evil and hate, despair and unhappiness as well as the brighter threads of joy and laughter, healing and acceptance, accomplishment and love. If we discard the darker threads we are only half alive, if we discard the brighter ones likewise – wholeness, salvation, Jesus way brings us together in ways that we can live good and healthy lives. Being with Jesus and learning how to live his way is the first part – the second is to accept we are sent into the world to share health, salvation, wholeness and the story of Jesus.

In the end it's a faith measurement of how we do this, with who, what and all that we are that is what we accomplish. Amen