

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/

© Chris Haslam

1 Samuel 16:1-13

NRSV

After his anointing by Samuel, David is mentioned as a lyre-player at the court of King Saul, ruler of an area north and east of Jerusalem (then called Jebus). David left his court to become a warlord to the south, in the Bethlehem area. Saul has enjoyed God's favour, but has lost it by disobeying the prophet Samuel's instructions. God now orders Samuel, his agent, to anoint a new king, a son of "Jesse". Samuel's route to Bethlehem is through Saul's territory, so he asks God how he is to make the trip (v. 2). God tells him to say that he comes to "sacrifice to the Lord": this is part of his purpose. "Eliab" (v. 6) is Jesse's eldest son. Surely a tall first-born is God's choice for king (vv. 6-7). But God's choice is not humankind's choice. (Jesse's second and third sons are "Abinadab", v. 8, and "Shammah", v. 9). David's complexion is "ruddy" (v. 12); he is God's choice. When Samuel anoints him (with olive oil), the "spirit of the Lord" (v. 13) comes upon him. His brothers are witnesses. Samuel returns to "Ramah", his seat of judgement. Saul persecutes David relentlessly but upon Saul's death in battle, David unifies the north and the south and ascends to the throne.

Psalm 23

NRSV

In the ancient Near East, the king was seen as shepherd (vv. 1-4) and as host (vv. 5-6). God faithfully provides for his sheep, and constantly cares for them. He revives our very lives ("soul", v. 3), and guides us in godly ways ("right paths"). Even when beset by evil ("darkest valley", v. 4), we have nothing to fear. God's "rod" (a defence against wolves and lions) protects us; his "staff" (v. 4, for rescuing sheep from thickets) guides us. The feast (v. 5) is even more impressive, for it is in the presence of his foes. Kings were plenteously anointed with oil (a symbol of power and dedication to a holy purpose). May God's "goodness and mercy" (v. 6, steadfast love) follow (or *pursue*) him (as do his enemies) throughout his life. He will continue to worship ("dwell ...") in the Temple as long as he lives.

Ephesians 5:8-14

NRSV

The author has exhorted his readers to conduct themselves ethically as befits those who have adopted the way of Christ. Having "put away your former way of life" (4:22) and being *clothed with the new self* (4:24) when they were "marked with a seal" (4:30) in baptism, they are now to lead moral lives for, being members of a body in which the Holy Spirit dwells, an offence against a member is an offence against God. They are to "share with the needy" (4:28), emphasize the good in others (4:29) and imitate "God" (5:1) and Christ. They must obey God (5:6). Now, in terminology also found at Qumran and in Matthew, the author contrasts unbelievers (who live in "darkness", 5:8, and disobey God) with those who are in "light" (5:8), "in the Lord". Christians should "expose" (5:11) deviations from

God's ways. Evil deeds are known to God (5:13). 5:14b may be a quote from an early baptismal hymn. Seek the "light", what God would have you do (5:10).

John 9:1-41

NRSV

Perhaps Jesus encounters the blind man in the precincts of the Temple, where beggars habitually gathered. Illness and physical disability were attributed to sin: in this case, either of the man (prenatally) or of "his parents" (v. 2). Jesus dismisses the link between sin and illness, at least in this case; rather he says that this man's impairment provides him with opportunities to do (and show) the works of God. Jesus and his followers ("we", v. 4) must do his mission while they can. A time is coming (from his crucifixion to his resurrection) when he, "the light of the world" (v. 5) will not be in the world, so he will be unable to "work" (v. 4, and the disciples will desert him). Jesus takes earth (the substance from which *human*, Adam, was made), makes a "mud" (v. 6) poultice, and applies it to the man's eyes. If he has trust enough to go to the "pool" (v. 7) and wash it off, he will have sight. He does; thus Jesus completes one of "God's works" (v. 3). John draws attention to "Siloam" (v. 7) as meaning "Sent", thereby alluding to Jesus as *sent* for the salvation of humankind – so washing symbolizes baptism.

Despite the man's claim to be the one who was a beggar, those who know him are divided: some say "it is he" (v. 9) but others doubt: he only looks like the beggar. In vv. 10-22, the man confirms his cure as genuine. The Pharisees consider making mud on the sabbath as breaking the Law (v. 14) so they examine the man. They too are divided (v. 16): between those who say Jesus can't be from God (for he breaks the Law) and those who wonder how a sabbath-breaker can perform miracles (which only one approved by God can do). So they question the man further, hoping that the dilemma can be resolved by discrediting the cure (v. 17). They ask: *What do you say about his opening of your eyes?* He insists that Jesus' power is from God ("a prophet"). The man's parents swear that their son was blind from birth but say no more, for fear of being cast out of the community (vv. 18-23). The Pharisees invite the man to confess that he has deceived them in claiming to be cured (v. 24). ("Give glory to God" is an Old Testament formula inviting confession.) The man boldly asserts the fact of the cure and adds, ironically: *if you listen to my story you may admit that Jesus is right!* (v. 27) They question Jesus' authority: "we know" (v. 29) that the Law is from God, but Jesus is an upstart! The man ridicules their *expert* opinion (v. 30). God only listens to sinners who are penitent (v. 31). Jesus must be "from God" (v. 33) for no one has ever before performed such a cure (v. 32). For trying to teach the Pharisees a lesson, the man is evicted from the synagogue ("drove him out", v. 34). Jesus invites him to express his faith shown by his conduct (vv. 35-38). He says he took on human form for two purposes: to give understanding, sight, of ultimate reality, and to punish those who think they "see" (v. 39) but don't. The Pharisees are incredulous (v. 40). Jesus says: if you were ignorant of God's ways ("blind", v. 41) you would be considered sin-less, but you make the unfounded assumption that you do "see", so you are liable to be punished.