Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. **Jaroslav Pelikan**

July 21st **The Shofar** *2 Samuel 7*

Our God is a faithful God

One of the key sustaining beliefs of men and women of God is that God's purposes will never fail. Without the eyes of faith it might prove to be difficult to sustain this proposition as we observe the ways men and women empowered by their own quest for power, fame and wealth taint but do not stop the saving works of God. And, in today's difficult times for the Church, it is this dependability of God that is of such great importance.

In the background to today's reading is the demand by the Hebrew people that God give them a king to rule over them. Why? Because they wanted to be "like the other nations around them". They had God as their King but tired of that kind of kingly reign. They wanted their own king, one who had all of the trappings of earthly power so that they could boast before the other nations. Imagine that kind of thinking. God and the experiences we have had with this God during the Exodus are not enough for us. We want something our neighbours might be able to offer us.

And so God gave them a king – Saul. He was a brave and mighty warrior but he did not prove himself to be the man of God he should have been. All the while God was preparing David, a "man after His own heart" (Acts 13:21-22).

Our ways and then God's ways

Let us look at the example of David moving the Ark of the Covenant into the City of Jerusalem. King David had mixed motives in taking this action (2 Samuel 6). Stategically it was a necessary move if he was going to succeed in uniting all of the Hebrew people together as a single nation. However, there is no word of David consulting Yahwe about this idea. The disorderly way in which the plan was first attempted cost a man his life. The second attempt was conducted according to the pattern laid down by Yahweh and was therefore successful - and the king danced before Yahweh. That is the model we are to take up in our own faith lives.

Then the king had another idea, to which Nathan the prophet also initially agreed: let us build a Temple (2 Samuel 7:2). Great idea but the wrong person to carry out that plan. God was going to allow a temple to be built but it would be by Solomon, Davids's son. Trying to go ahead without a divine blessing is to doom the plan to failure. This is no mere event of the past for we have all seen and been burdened with all kinds of programmes and projects that are presented as being the best thing for our parish only to have them fall by the wayside when they are not driven by God's Holy Spirit. It was Yahweh Himself who vetoed the plan for David to build a Temple.

God is not contained by human ways

We know from reading back through the Bible that God was trying to teach Israel a significant lesson: Yahweh cannot be contained in a building (2 Samuel 7:6-7). From the time God led the people out of slavery in Egypt to a new life in Canaan, He had been content to dwell in tabernacles. They were not his home for He "walked" whenever and wherever He willed. There was nowhere that was not the "home" of God and if they built a Temple, it was not for God but for themselves. God was not like the gods of the nations. Having their house shrines and places of worship on the mountain tops was a part of their very human desire to have their god as a part of their everyday living. Israel's God was already there and everywhere else as well.

It is clear for us that it was not David's task to build the Temple, but his son's (2 Samuel 7:12-13). The subsequent history shows that this referred in the first instance to

Solomon's Temple (1 Chronicles 22:6-10). But that did not tie God to any particular place, a way of thinking that stymied their ability to see God at work in those places and events outside of the Temple precinct. It was why they struggle *to sing the songs of the Lord on alien soil* (Babylon). Religion cannot contain God. It is but a helpful way of grounding faith in our daily living and in making God known to the world.

We must not straight jacket God

This is exactly the reality with which we are faced today. It is sad to note, as I travel around the remote areas of Queensland and NSW, just how many of the churches are closed, locked and sold off. Their emptiness stands as a tribute to what happens when religion replaces faith. The presence of Yahweh was not to be confined to a Temple, however fine or grand. Neither are the people of God to be defined by churches and buildings, by styles of worship, the language of our Bibles or by the way we have done things in the past. The true Church is found residing with the people of God, washed in the blood of Jesus - whoever, and wherever, they are. We do not need a fulltime minister to make that a reality and all of these church building would be open today of the Christians of the place loved God so fully, so passionately that they would come together once a week (at least) to give praise and thanks, to God, to worship their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For that we do not need an ordained person. It is all about faith and not just credal beliefs.

Yahweh had taken David from the sheepfolds, and established the kingdom under his hands. But the steps are significant. Yahweh was the giver, and David the recipient (2 Samuel 7:8-9). It was in God's gift to settle the people in the land, and give them rest from their enemies (2 Samuel 7:10-11). The message on which to focus is that everything the people then did in the land was to be a celebration of that divine initiative. It was so that, with God in their midst, the nations around them would come to know, love and serve Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews.

David had wanted to build a house for God, but Yahweh intended rather to build a very different kind of house the - that is, the dynasty - of David. The singular "seed" (2 Samuel 7:12) refers to the promised seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), and the seed of Abraham, "which is Christ" (Galatians 3:16). While the plans and vision of God extended beyond the limitations of time and space, David was keen on building a legacy of his own. As we know from our own Christian traditions, that kind of thinking never ends well.

God has a plan – trust it!

The kingdom God wanted was to be established forever under the hands of David's son (2 Samuel 7:12-16) - ultimately, Jesus (Luke 1:33). The first part of 2 Samuel 7:14 is quoted in Hebrews 1:5, where it is applied to Jesus. The qualifications at the end of the verse evidently belong to the kings of the line of David, from Solomon to the carrying away into Babylon.

Solomon would build God's house, and God would build the "house" (dynasty) of David. Even during the dark years of the Exile, when there was once more no apparent "King" in Israel, the dispersed Jews held on to the hope of One who would come to re-establish David's kingdom. Then one day God returned, and taking up a new tabernacle walked right back into the lives of His people (John 1:14).

David's story is a story for out time

Most of the things we do as churches comes to us from much earlier times. While the world has been going through tumultuous changes, we have largely avoided great dislocation because we have held onto what we have always done.

Some have sought to change the Church by tearing down aspects of its past, by introducing innovations that bear little similarity to our foundational beliefs. Like David, it is as if we need to be reminded that it is God first last and in between that matters. It is only by our close collaboration with Jesus Christ that we can find ourselves in tune with the ways of God. Instead of building "temples" that fall down and are locked away, we build a worshipping people for God.