

*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/](http://www.montreal.anglican.org/comments/)

© Chris Haslam

## 2 Samuel 5:1-5,9-10

NRSV

David has settled at Hebron (see 2:3). He is publicly anointed to rule over Judah by the council of tribal heads. Meanwhile, in the north, Abner, once Saul's military commander, makes Ishbaal, Saul's son, puppet king over the northern tribes (see 2:8). Both tribal coalitions plan to annex Gibeon, northwest of Jerusalem. They try to settle the dispute by a tournament, but when this attempt fails, they go to war: David's troops win. Abner, recognizing a lost cause, switches to David's side (see 3:1-10). Abner is killed (see 3:22-29); Ishbaal's courage fails and he is murdered by two of his own, who are then killed on David's orders, for killing "a righteous man" (4:11). David has Abner and Ishbaal buried at Hebron, thus showing them respect.

Now, there being no acceptable successor to Saul, the "tribes of Israel" (v. 1), the north, seek David's consent to becoming their king too. He has a right to be king for he is an Israelite and was army commander under Saul (v. 2). The council of the north ("elders of Israel", v. 3) anoint him king over them too; the states are thus joined in one person. David now conquers a city belonging to neither, and makes it a neutral capital. (The "Jebusites", v. 6, are local Canaanites.) The defenders scoff at David's attempt at conquest: even the "blind and the lame" will be his match, but David's army prevails: Canaanite power is removed; Jerusalem becomes "the city of David" (v. 9). Per this story, the troops appear to enter via the "water shaft" (v. 8), the tunnel through the walls to the water spring. David's hatred for the "lame ...", is cited as the cause of their exclusion from the Temple: clearly a later addition in line with Leviticus 21:17-23. The "Millo" (v. 9) is probably the earthwork to the north of the city. David has increased in power with the help of God, the deity common to north and south.

## Psalm 48

NRSV

The psalm celebrates the beauty and security of Jerusalem, partly built on Mount Zion. God is to be praised as her god. She is the "joy" (v. 2) of all people. God is the "great King"; he defends her (v. 3a); he is her "sure defence". When kings unite in attacking her (v. 4), the very sight of her stops them in their tracks (v. 5); their armies are scattered like sea-going ships when hit by a storm ("east wind", v. 7) and retreat and shake ("trembling", v. 6) with pain, like "a woman in labour". V. 8 is Israel's reaction. Yet Jerusalem is a joy to pilgrims who consider God's gift of love when worshipping in the Temple (v. 9). God shows himself to all; his power ("right hand", v. 10) is just, both to enemies and pilgrims; may we rejoice in his decisions. Let us process around the city and her defences, both physical and divine (v. 12); may future generations (v. 13) hear this: God is the source of her strength and "our guide" (v. 14) forever.

Paul continues to rebut his critics. In 11:21b-33, he has answered them on loyalty to his Jewish heritage, and his achievements and suffering for Christ. They appear to claim superiority to him in another area: visions and revelations. He has said: "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (11:30) and "It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord" (12:1).

Now in v. 2, in humility, he speaks as though someone else had a vision: "a person in Christ", (but see v. 7, "me"). It really did happen: "fourteen years ago" I had a mystical experience which is undecipherable ("in the body ...", v. 3). (God lives in "the third heaven", v. 2, or "Paradise", v. 4.) What I heard was like what members of Greek cults must not reveal ("things ..."). I really do have grounds for boasting, but I will not explain, lest anyone have too exalted an idea of me (v. 6). A "thorn ... in the flesh" (v. 7) keeps me from "being too elated": a chronic condition, a physical or mental disability, a recurring illness – or opposition of one or more people. ("Satan" was thought responsible for disease as well as sin.) At one time, I repeatedly "appealed to the Lord" (v. 8) but he said: *the affliction will not be removed, for the power of God is more apparent when it works through a sufferer* (v. 9). "So, I will boast ... of my weaknesses" so that the Holy Spirit, "the power of Christ", may be in me and work through me. So I accept my condition as it is, "for the sake of Christ" (v. 10), for when I feel weak, I am most effectively showing God's power. I have been forced to use the tactics of my critics, i.e. boasting (v. 11). He has shown himself to be a "true apostle" (v. 12).

## Mark 6:1-13

NRSV

Mark has told us of Jesus' success with the crowds. They have listened to the word expressed in parables; they have seen him heal the sick. He has commissioned and instructed the twelve, showing them that he has power over nature, sickness and even death. Now Jesus leaves the "place" where he has healed the woman and Jairus' daughter, and comes to his "hometown" in Galilee, with those who trust in him. His reception in the synagogue is different from that in 1:21-28; they now ask: *Who is this guy? How can a mere carpenter be so wise? It doesn't add up: how can he possibly do supernatural deeds?* "They took offence at him" (v. 3): the rejection begins. (The word translated *offence* also means *stumbling block*.) Jesus rebuts: Israel has often rejected prophets who came to save her. Because the people of his "hometown" lack faith, he does few miracles there (v. 5).

Perhaps as a result of rejection at home, Jesus concentrates on rural areas. He sends out "the twelve" (v. 7) to minister, to extend his proclaiming of God's Kingdom in word and action; they too will heal, mostly by exorcism ("unclean spirits"). His orders to them (vv. 8-9) are set in first-century Palestine; because of the urgency of the mission and the need to trust in God, they are to subordinate material and physical concerns to the task of preaching, as he does. They are not to waste time seeking better accommodation (v. 10); nor on those who refuse to listen: just move on (v. 11). They are to do what Jesus has begun (v. 12).