

## July 5, 2009: Readings for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

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

*All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The LORD said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. David occupied the stronghold, and named it the city of David. David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.*

David became greater and greater; he went from strength to strength.

This is an intriguing passage for us, on the Sunday after Independence Day and in the midst of our Governor's difficulties.

Mark Sanford compared himself to David, another troubled chief executive, in the days after this sad affair began.

This lesson is about the creation of ancient Israel's monarchy; redolent in national feeling.

We have heard already of the call of David, when the prophet Samuel found him herding sheep, as God had sent him to do.

That was a secret and divinely-ordered mission.

Here, some of Israel's other leaders come to David and ask him to extend his kingship to them.

To say that this was a democratic moment would overstate the case;

David was a monarch of the old school.

We will hear more about the trouble into which that great power got him.

But David's power was both divinely given and popularly recognized.

God wanted David to be king; the elders of the people wanted David to be king; the people wanted David to be king.

That is a powerful combination for kingly and national success.

Democracy and divine sanction are a good combination.

On this Sunday closest to our national feast day, we can give thanks to God that we do enjoy a democratic republic and that indeed we have been blessed by God to be a force for good in the world much or even most of the time.

But the writer of Samuel is less interested in democracy than God's blessing.

He says that David became greater and greater because Yahweh, the God of Hosts, was with him.

"It was because Yahweh, the God of the heavenly armies, was with him."

"I am with you" is a fair summary of the good news that runs through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

Moses thought up five excuses in Exodus 3-4 about why he should not be the leader in the Exodus.

Time and again said, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12),

And "I will be with your mouth," God said when Moses tried the lame excuse that he did not know how to talk (Exodus 4:12).

When called some centuries later, Jeremiah had that he was only a teenager and therefore could not be a prophet.

God countered, "Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:8).

In Matthew's description of the significance of Jesus, he remembered the ancient prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, "They shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us'" (cf. Matthew 1:23).

And the last word of Jesus, ascending, in that Gospel is: "And remember, I am with you to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

This is the good news about Jesus; that in him God is with us, and indeed more than with us.

In Jesus, the Father chose to be with us in the most dramatic and intimate and powerful and eternal way.

In the life of a perfect God-Man, the Father has drawn us to himself.

And the Lord Jesus held no part of his life back from us, sharing our life and death, our bitterest pain and our greatest joy.

This is a vital foundation of our faith, the confession that God is with us.

If you do not feel it, seek it. God is with you, whether you know it or not.

That great good news means that David and all of us who follow after him are never alone.

As I said, our governor recently compared himself with David; before long we will arrive at the stories of David's fall and his great injustice in the matter of Uriah the Hittite and Bathsheba.

And though I am ashamed of and perplexed by the governor's actions, his comparison is apt;

and there is indeed hope even for him, for God has not abandoned even foolish Mark Sanford.

So there is an implicit word of forgiveness in this simple sentence; that God is with us.

God promises to be with us, personally and corporately, as individuals, as nation, as church.

With each of you, by virtue of your baptism, God has made an unshakable commitment to you, for you have died with Christ and have been raised with him.

And though I am not inclined to make our nation a new Israel or another chosen people, I do believe that God is with us, for he is with all people who struggle for justice, peace, and equality.

And though we sometimes struggle, there are none better than the better angels of this nation, so God is with us.

Indeed, God is even with ineffective leaders, with those who do violence and with dictators,

God is with them as their judge and in the prophets God raises up to call them back to a more faithful way.

The ancient question that Paul asks in Romans 8 remains illuminating: If God is with us, who can be against us?

As David and all of us know, God can be with us and still we live apart from God's purposes.

Let us pray that we, as Christians and as a nation, will be almost as faithful to God as God is to us.