

# 23 August Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 8:22-30, 3: 41-43

Psalm 84

Ephesians 6: 10-20

John 6:56-69

Textweek [Proper 16B/Ordinary 21B/Pentecost 13 August 23, 2015](#)

The writer of 1 Kings is documenting a sort of pseudo-history threaded through with an interpretation of social, religious and political developments within Israel from the enthronement of Solomon and the death of David through to about 870 BC.

The political view of Solomon, as demonstrated in the first reading today, hints of an understanding and a worldview that is ahead of its time and that is also ahead of both the present day church and the political outlook within Australia.

Solomon, in prayer, articulates a refreshingly open appreciation of God: *"will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!"*

An equally open appreciation and honouring is demonstrated toward the 'foreigner'; *"Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name..... when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, 43 then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you"*

Solomon's prayer does not display a certainty of knowing about God, and does not require that foreigner's be assimilated or converted into any established system of beliefs; rather Solomon prays that the foreigner be heard and that what the foreigner asks be responded to.

Clearly Solomon is not an Australian, he is neither Labor nor Liberal and he's also not a mainstream Jew, Christian, Muslim or Buddhist; in fact it is quite difficult to place the source of Solomon's outlook and perhaps that's why the passage today begins with his GPS location; *"Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel"*.

The first reading and the poetry of the Psalm provide us with an introduction to reflect on the place of our own 'dwelling'; and to question for ourselves where do we 'Abide'.

Where do we live?

Where do we find life and realise life's fullness and our real sense of being and purpose...

Before looking for obvious answers, we might look again at the gospel; it is a challenging gospel; and that's underlined in the narrative with the observation that "*many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.*"

Jesus is speaking about 'abiding', and says; "*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.*"

Over the years the church has interpreted this gospel into the liturgy of Holy Communion; and at different times has sought to provide some abstract understanding of 'abiding presence'; but is there something even more challenging.

"*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.*" I'm not sure this is pointing us toward regular attendance at a communion service and that becomes evident when we hear the next line: "*as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me*".

Jesus is speaking of life's purpose and so again we might ask of ourselves 'what is the purposeful life in which we abide?'

Jesus is also talking about a completely new order of living "*This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.*"

Perhaps it is easier to rewrite the gospel without the bread, wine, flesh and blood baggage, and to context it within the frameworks of today....

In a very general sense we live in the world and seek to be happy, and paradoxically we live with an expectation of decay into death.

The gospel, the teaching of Jesus introduces us to a new life landscape.

What if we live with an orientation toward wholeness rather than happiness and with an expectation of fullness rather than decay into death.

Hugh Mackay, author of *The Good life*, wrote "The crucial test of a life well lived is the quality of our responses to the needs of others. Everything else is peripheral and mostly trivial."

What we can discover in our Eucharist is a ritual of life that embodies the new order of the gospel, that echoes what Hugh MacKay wrote and that resonates with our deepest, most purposeful sense of living.

Our coming together speaks of wholeness, and embraces the other, it is an act of selflessness in which we each contribute or give to the real needs of each other.

It is an act of giving thanks, and again that has an outward orientation, giving from ourselves into the wholeness of all.

We acknowledge the divine presence *the bread that came down from heaven*.

And in consuming that same bread, we feed, or receive life; we engage in a counter-intuitive act reversing the 'decay into death' and so placing ourselves into the position of "*the one who eats this bread will live forever*."

Let's stay a little longer with our contemplation of the Eucharist, and the following, rather long, quote speaks of a powerful magnificence:

### **Dom Gregory Dix on the Holy Eucharist**

"Throughout All Ages, World Without End"

Was ever another command so obeyed? For century after century, spreading slowly to every continent and country and among every race on earth, this action has been done, in every conceivable human circumstance, for every conceivable human need from infancy and before it to extreme old age and after it, from the pinnacle of earthly greatness to the refuge of fugitives in the caves and dens of the earth. Men have found no better thing than this to do for kings at their crowning and for criminals going to the scaffold; for armies in triumph or for a bride and bridegroom in a little country church; for the proclamation of a dogma or for a good crop of wheat; for the wisdom of the Parliament of a mighty nation or for a sick old woman afraid to die; for a schoolboy sitting an examination or for Columbus setting out to discover America; for the famine of whole provinces or for the soul of a dead lover; in thankfulness because my father did not die of pneumonia; for a village headman much tempted to return to fetich because the yams

had failed; because the Turk was at the gates of Vienna; for the repentance of Margaret; for the settlement of a strike; for a son for a barren woman; for Captain so-and-so wounded and prisoner of war; while the lions roared in the nearby amphitheatre; on the beach at Dunkirk; while the hiss of scythes in the thick June grass came faintly through the windows of the church; tremulously, by an old monk on the fiftieth anniversary of his vows; furtively, by an exiled bishop who had hewn timber all day in a prison camp near Murmansk; gorgeously, for the canonisation of S. Joan of Arc—one could fill many pages with the reasons why men have done this, and not tell a hundredth part of them. And best of all, week by week and month by month, on a hundred thousand successive Sundays, faithfully, unflinchingly, across all the parishes of Christendom, the pastors have done this just to make the plebs sancta Dei—the holy common people of God.

Clearly, from those words we can appreciate the 'Abiding' nature of the Eucharist; but for each one us, the earlier questions remain:

Where do we 'Abide'.

Where do we live?

Where do we find life and realise life's fullness and our real sense of being and purpose...

and

What is the purposeful life in which we abide?