

## We can rely totally on the Word, Jesus Christ!

Lately, I have been reading about David's life story in 1 and 2 Samuel. Then, in 1 Kings, we are given the details of David's death. Before he died, David gave instructions to his son Solomon (1 Kings 2). Sadly, David's offspring failed. After David's death, Solomon lapsed into idolatry and oppressed his people with hard labour. After Solomon's death, the once-united people of God broke into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. In time, both Israel and Judah would be brought to ruin and exiled to a foreign land, forced to bow their knees to other gods that the oppressors chose for them. The kingdoms had at least to wonder, "Why this harsh judgment? Why all this suffering? What went wrong? We had the monarch and a strong economy, and most of all we had the temple. God's own seat on earth was right here with us." Someone must have thought something had gone very horribly wrong here.

We remember that God had promised David a throne forever. In 2 Samuel 7:16, God said to David, "*Your house and your kingdom will stand firm before you for ever. Your throne will be established for ever.*" But the kingdoms had failed. The kings of Israel and of Judah allowed idolatry to creep into their lands, and they forgot the covenant of their God.

The problem we must recognise is not the covenant promises of God. The problem is, was, and forever in this world will be the hearts of people. When God gives wealth, we crave more, and some will do *anything* to get more. When God gives authority or power, *we lord it over others*. When given a kingdom and a temple and every good thing we need for this body and life, *we want more*. Our sin, our greed, our pride, and our lust destroy us.

This was the story of Israel and its kings - even David. They became enamoured with themselves. Forget the politics and the intrigue and the taxes and the forced labour. Forget the battles they fought and the terrible choices they made. The biggest problem in the kingdom was not labour or tax policy. The biggest problem was that they had forgotten God. That fundamental covenant with the LORD God, "*I shall take you as My people and shall be your God*" (Ex. 6:7), was lost in the dust.

I've been lost in the dust before, and so have you. We've been beaten and bruised and battered by the world. We've been held up for scrutiny and ridicule, not just by others making fun of us during those awkward teenage years but also by every last sin that Satan can dig out of our closets and hold up for all the world to see. You remember the day you lost your temper, the hour you lost your purity, the times and again you've lost the battle against your addiction, and it grinds us to dust.

We've forgotten the covenant. Let me add this: you don't need to give God attention for His sake, like a toddler or a puppy who gets into trouble if you don't pay attention. He is still God whether you forget Him or not. We give God attention for our sakes. We've ignored the Word, and now, full of guilt, the kingdoms we make for ourselves fall apart, and we sit in the ashes. Is God gone? People asked the same question in 1 Samuel 4:21 when a mother named her newborn son Ichabod - which means, "Where's the glory?" For the glory of God had seemingly departed Israel.

When we are left in the dust of life, trying to make heads or tails of the world, we need someone on whom we can rely.

Welcome, then, to the words of Psalm 89, our Introit for this Fourth Sunday in Advent. When we are lost and stuck and think there's no way out, thank God we're wrong. When you think that there's nothing on which you can rely, thank God you're wrong.

"*Let me sing about the merciful acts of the LORD for ever!*" says the psalmist (v 1). "Let me sing about the 'chesed' of the LORD forever!" is the Hebrew. 'Chesed' is one of the great Hebrew words in the Bible. It means so much more than just the emotion or feeling of love. It implies action. I shall sing of the steadfast love, the covenant faithfulness, the abiding loyalty of the LORD. I shall sing of the lover who will do whatever it takes to maintain the covenant relationship. The LORD our God will do whatever it takes to have for Himself a people. He will walk through the fires and the deep valley of death to bring His people home.

There is a word, there is a promise, from God Himself on which Israel can rely. Even in loss, even in exile, you can rely on the promise, the word, the covenant faithfulness of God. Listen again to verses 3-4: "*You have said: 'I have made a Covenant with My chosen one. I have sworn an oath to My servant David: 'I shall establish your Descendant for ever and build up your throne for all generations.'*" The LORD's word is totally reliable.

"*I have made a Covenant with My chosen one,*" the LORD says. Advent is all about this chosen one of God, that beautiful Word and promise of God who became flesh and blood. John 1:14: "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*" This baby, this child born in Bethlehem, is the totally reliable Word of God for us! From His birth to His suffering and death, His resurrection and ascension, His unbreakable promise to His people is totally reliable.

The LORD God's steadfast love is forever, and we can rely on Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

We rely on the One of whom our psalm resounds, the trustworthy Word whose birth we long for with Advent hope: "*I shall establish your Descendant for ever and build up your throne for all generations*" (v 4). There is mystery and wonder in the manger. There is all the surpassing greatness of the incarnation of God for us to ponder. His love is for us. He, the root and offspring of Jesse, is for us, and on this Jesus Christ, the Word, we can totally rely.