

Our reading from the second book of Samuel today is, in many ways, a turning point in the history of the Jewish nation. Up until now we have had the promise of a nation descending from Abraham. We have had Moses leading that nation towards the land that God had promised them – a journey fleeing from the Egyptians, learning the laws of God as Moses receives the 10 commandments, and then Moses taking them to the opposite side of the Jordan from the Promised land. We had Joshua taking the people into the promised land, claiming that land by force, as the people settle into their new home.

But then people became disgruntled and complained to Samuel, who was their spiritual leader, that they wanted a King, and they got Saul as King. But that went wrong as Saul disobeyed God, and David was chosen. And David has now reunited the nation of Israel, and has brought the Jebusite town of Jerusalem into the country and made it the country's spiritual capital by installing the Ark of God into the city. And now we are going to see God doing something for the second time.

Our reading starts with the introduction of Nathan the prophet into the story, and this slightly strange, but utterly believable, conversation between David and Nathan.

David (comfortably settled in his palace): Hey Nathan, it seems a bit wrong to me that I am sitting in this lovely palace, built for me out of Cedar wood, whilst the ark of God is out there in a tent.

Nathan: Whatever you have in mind, your majesty, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.

OK, so what was the role of a prophet in the Old Testament?

Well, Nathan isn't the first prophet to give David advice. Whilst David was hiding from King Saul, as Saul was trying to kill him. The prophet Gad advised him where to go. Gad in fact makes a reappearance later in David's life as a messenger from God who gives David 3 choices of punishment when he does something wrong. So Gad, the prophet, simply seems to be a messenger.

Nathan on the other hand, at the moment, seems to be a bit of yes man. What would you like to do your majesty? Oh I think that's a wonderful idea. Is that how we see prophets? As King's employees really? Well, when we come to the more well known prophets like Isaiah, and Elijah, and Jeremiah, they seem to be operating very much independently from the King in place at the time – instead warning the King and the people what will happen if they continue to disobey God. I think there is a message there for all of us – we need people in our lives who will, helpfully, challenge our faith from time to time. We don't just need Yes people, we need, perhaps, Why people.

So back to Nathan and what changed? Well perhaps the start is the conversation between Nathan and God told in this reading this morning, and in this God is initially saying, No – I don't want this. But he actually starts by saying, whether or not I want a house, do I want David to be the person to build it? So, the first knock down for David really.

Then we get the bigger response – why do I want to be confined in a house, stuck in one spot? I have always travelled with my people – that's what you can do with a tent, and yes, you might want to settle in one place, but do I?

And then God seems to mellow a bit. Again instructing Nathan to say all this to David, God says, "Look. I took you from being a shepherd to being a King. I looked after you on the way. And now I will make your name great. And I will provide a safe place for my people, who are also your people. I will protect you from your enemies. And after you die, your son will become King – and he will build my house."

A few things from that. The way that Saul was told that his time as King was coming to an end is when Samuel told him that Saul's son Jonathan would not inherit the title. If Saul had obeyed God then his family could have been the one on which the future of God's people was built, but No. Saul had blown it.

Second, in this reading there is a bit of a play on words with the use of the word house. The house of David could be referring to the people of David or the bricks and mortar in which he lives. And when God tells Nathan to say to David, "He (David's son that we now know is Solomon) is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his Kingdom for ever" we see that double meaning again. The amazing temple that Solomon built and that image of God occupying it, and Solomon taking forward God's people through another generation.

And third, going back to, "Did God want to live in a house?" I wonder if that conversation went a bit like this:

God tapped Nathan on the shoulder that night. Did Nathan have a nasty feeling he might have been a bit hasty in saying yes to David? Was he tossing and turning? Err, excuse me, Nathan. You know this house. It's for me to live in, right? Do you think that perhaps I should be consulted about it? Actually I don't care so much for houses. I like being on the move, you see." God's problem with us is that we like to tie God down, keep God under control. We don't want God on the loose. But God likes being on the loose.

But the last thing I want to draw from that passage goes back to when I said we are going to see God doing something for the second time.

Do you remember when the people of Israel were complaining to Samuel that they wanted a King. Samuel tried to talk them out of it. God gave Samuel some useful tips to help him talk them out of it. Higher taxes. A king will take your children and put them in the army. The list went on, but the people insisted they wanted a King. And God said, "Let them have a King." He let the people have what they wanted, despite what He wanted.

This time, it appears to be just David. God, you need to be in a house. Actually, not just a house but a magnificent house. Well, actually I don't. But it's not right that I have this splendid house that is made of amazing cedar wood and you live in a tent. But I can move around with a tent. But God eventually said, OK, not you, but your son can build me a temple.

For the second time, apparently against his better judgement, God let the people, or a person, have their way.

Are we sometimes in danger of insisting to God that we have our way? Do we want to tie God down, to fit God into an image that we are comfortable with?

As I was pondering this I started to wonder about some of the things I say, some of the things I pray for, and do they indicate that I am stuck in my own thoughts rather than really opening up to what God is telling me He wants. An example came to me as I read this week whilst researching this reading from 2 Samuel. I frequently pray for us as we work towards building God's Kingdom in these four villages. But Jesus never talks about our establishing God's kingdom or furthering it or extending it or even building it. In the Gospels, the only things we do to God's kingdom are wait for it, see it, enter it, seek it, receive it, inherit it, and declare that it has come. We don't need to build God's kingdom because God has already done it. We are not trying to create something new; we are trying to encourage people to explore something that already exists. And the word that came to me whilst considering all this was, "confidence". Do we have confidence in God's Kingdom already existing here in Thriplow this morning? Are our confidence levels significantly higher when we sit in this church building this morning than they will be as we travel home at the end of the service? God did not want to be trapped in a building – indeed God isn't trapped in a building.

God's house is here as a convenient place for us to worship him. When we walk down the drive and along the road God is just as much with us, because that is God's Kingdom too.

When Nathan the prophet reported to David all that God had revealed to him, that was the beginning of David's dynasty, the real beginning of the House of David, from which Jesus came. This was that turning point in the Jewish nation. It was a promise, a covenant, that God made with David, and David's nation.

I think that God wants to make a covenant with each part of his Kingdom every day. No, I'm not suggesting that those covenants will have the impact that the covenant he made with David had, but it could make a difference to our villages here.

Somehow the idea that what we are doing is living in God's Kingdom in these four villages; that we are going to be trying to explain to people that they are also part of God's Kingdom in these four villages, and together to try and understand what that means makes the job that is ahead of us feel slightly lighter this morning. Because the important thing is that hardest part of that job, the building of the Kingdom of God, has already been done.

So welcome to God's kingdom.