

Sixth Sunday after Whitsunday

Psalm 48

II Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

Mark 6:1-13

Coronations are a big deal. Nations live by them. Children sometimes dream of them.

They have existed in some form or another in almost every culture on earth. From the Pacific islands to the Egyptian court.

A coronation ceremony is the ritual placing of a crown, or the ritual placing of oil, on the head of a new ruler. Usually a public ceremony signifying to the entire region and beyond a shift in power and leadership—a supreme symbol of authority.

When Christianity spread throughout Europe, crowning ceremonies became more and more ornate—held in the beauty and splendor of medieval cathedrals with a bishop to celebrate. These coronations had become so vital to European Christianity that at one point they were known as the ‘eighth’ sacrament.

Coronations were never quite celebrated and observed in the New World. Though time and time again in the early days of the city of Boston, King’s Chapel recited prayers of thanksgiving when a new British sovereign ascended the throne.

In 1761, when news of King George the III’s coronation reached the shores of New England, our bell pealed through the city of Boston. Not quite a welcomed sound.

And in the Bible coronations are a very big deal.

There are 99 Kings and 12 Queens listed or referred to in the Bible. Forty-Three of them, their coronations are described. From the briefest of sentences: and “he was anointed king” to detailed accounts: of rich pageantry in the Temple, oils and prayers, religious elders, and acclamations of “Long live the King.”

Yes, Coronations are a big deal.

In our first reading this morning, the prophet Samuel gives us an account of the anointing of David to be king over Israel—a coronation, an inauguration, an investiture.

The scriptures tell of three separate coronations for King David—each coronation bringing with it a new realm over which David reigns. Nearly each coronation is the same. With a small bit of oil and the hands of a high priest and prophet. But we can imagine David, surrounded by crowds of onlookers, walking into the Temple, approaching elders, ascending his throne.

David—just thirty years old—is crowned, anointed, set to reign over all of Israel.

Coronations. They are magical, mysterious, regal.

Toward the end of this coronation story, Samuel tells us that King David went from strength to strength—he became greater and greater.

Those of us who know our Bibles, or know of King David, know that his reign was far from perfect.

He led Israel into battle—thousands upon thousands killed. He executed. Imprisoned many. Committed Adultery.

Not quite the Sovereign one would want.

But still Samuel tells us this about David: And he became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him. God, was with him.

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The short sentence "I am with you" is at the heart of the good news in the Bible. An odd and curious affirmation that appears time and time again in our scriptures.

Moses thought up five excuses about why he should not be the leader in the Exodus—not lead God's people out of slavery. Then God said, "I will be with you."

Jeremiah had argued 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."

In Matthew's description of the the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah "They shall name him Emmanuel, which means, 'God is with us.'"

And the last words of Jesus before his ascension: "And remember, I am with you to the end of the age."

I am with you. God is with you.

Words of encouragement. Words of challenge. Words of a radical love that breaks through our human understanding.

Often in the Bible this affirmation—the affirmation that God is with us—comes to those humble and meek ones who's greatest sin is resisting God's call. From Moses to Mary. Jeremiah to the followers of Jesus.

But when it comes to David, flawed, imperfect David, we pause. It proves a challenge. If God remains with David—in all of his brokenness—then God is with others just as limited, amiss, human.

God is with those are aren't like me. Don't believe like me. Practice like me. Look like me.

God is with leaders of nations, leaders of religion, who stumble, who fail.

God is with whole nations, perhaps even whole religions, that might not be like us.

A hard thought to swallow, a difficult notion to believe—but God might be, just might be with my enemy. Those who hate me—those who I sometimes hate—a former classmate, a bully, a neighbor, a leader, a group.

Because if God is with David—the murderer, the liar—than God (perhaps somehow, someday) is with those who wish us harm—those whose goal in life is to threaten, terrorize, harm. Because if God's assurance of presence and love rests with David, then somehow, someday, that same assurance, that same presence can be, might be with those that human limitations say are not worthy.

A hard thought to swallow, a difficult notion to believe, I know. But here is the grace:

God is with them, then surely—surely God is with me. Imperfect. Flawed. Human me.

I am with you.

There is an implicit word of forgiveness in this simple sentence.

However broken and however lacking in confidence we might be, God is not ashamed to be with David, or me, or any of us.

I am with you.

There is a sense of empowerment when we can fall into complete love, complete trust with this promise.

Whether it is the ability to trust, to carry out our day to day vocations, or to face all the challenges of life -- including our own mortality -- God's "I am with you" means that we have the promise of strength and encouragement—that we do not go through life alone.

I am with you.

We may not have a crown like King David, or have receive holy royal oils like David, but you and me, we have something just a powerful, more than powerful, we have that sweet and sound assurance that no matter how broken, how amiss, how human we are, in times of want and in times of plenty, God's presence is with us.

God is with me. God is with you. God is with us, imperfect, flawed, human, us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.