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Alastair Roberts

Adonijah's coup and Solomon anointed king. Wives and husbands.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Kings 1. Now King David was old and advanced in years, and although they covered him with clothes he could not get warm. Therefore his servants said to him, Let a young woman be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait on the king and be in his service. Let her lie in your arms that my lord the king may be warm.

So they sought for a beautiful young woman throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The young woman was very beautiful, and she was of service to the king and attended to him, but the king knew her not. Now Adonijah the son of Haggath exalted himself, saying, I will be king, and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen and fifty men to run before him.

His father had never at any time displeased him by asking, Why have you done thus and so? He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom. He conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest, and they followed

Adonijah and helped him. But Zadok the priest, and Benaniah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rehi, and David's mighty men were not with Adonijah.

Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and fattened cattle by the serpent's stone, which is beside En-Rogel, and he invited all his brothers the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah. But he did not invite Nathan the prophet, or Benaniah, or the mighty men, or Solomon his brother. Then Nathan said to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggath has become king, and David our lord does not know it? Now therefore come, let me give you advice that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon.

Go in at once to king David and say to him, Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant saying Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne? Why then is Adonijah king? Then while you are still speaking with the king I also will come in after you and confirm your words. So Bathsheba went to the king in his chamber. Now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was attending to the king.

Bathsheba bowed and paid homage to the king, and the king said, What do you desire? She said to him, My lord, you swore to your servant by the lord your god, saying, Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne. And now behold, Adonijah is king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it. He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army, but Solomon your servant he has not invited.

And now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him, otherwise it will come to pass when my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be counted offenders. While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in, and they told the king, Here is Nathan the prophet. And when he came in before the king he bowed before the king with his face to the ground.

And Nathan said, My lord the king, have you said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne? For he has gone down this day, and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. And behold, they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, Long live king Adonijah, but me your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Ben-Nahar the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited. Has this thing been brought about by my lord the king, and you have not told your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him? Then king David answered, Call Bathsheba to me.

So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. And the king swore, saying, As the lord lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, as I swore to you by the lord the God of Israel, saying, Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place, even so will I do this day. Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and paid homage to the king, and said, May my lord king David live forever.

King David said, Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Ben-Nahar the son of Jehoiada. So they came before the king. And the king said to them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon, and let Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel.

Then blow the trumpet, and say, Long live king Solomon. You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, for he shall be king in my place. And I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.

And Ben-Nahar the son of Jehoiada answered the king, Amen. May the lord the God of my lord the king say so. As the lord has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David.

So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Ben-Nahar the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down, and had Solomon ride on king David's mule, and brought him to Gihon. There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent, and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, Long live king Solomon.

And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise. Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they finished feasting. And when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he said, What does this uproar in the city mean? While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiath the priest came, and Adonijah said, Come in, for you are a worthy man, and bring good news.

Jonathan answered Adonijah, No, for our lord king David has made Solomon king, and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Ben-Nahar the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and they had him ride on the king's mule. And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him as king at Gihon, and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard.

Solomon sits on the royal throne. Moreover the king's servants came to congratulate our lord king David, saying, May your God make the name of Solomon more famous than yours, and make his throne greater than your throne. And the king bowed himself on the

bed.

And the king also said, Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who has granted someone to sit on my throne this day, my own eyes seeing it. Then all the guests of Adonijah trembled and rose, and each went his own way. And Adonijah feared Solomon.

So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. Then it was told Solomon, Behold, Adonijah fears king Solomon, for behold he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword. And Solomon said, If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die.

So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to king Solomon. And Solomon said to him, Go to your house.

First Kings chapter 1 begins with David being old and cold. The beautiful young Abishag is brought to warm his bed, but David does not have sexual relations with her. This is a very strange note on which to begin a book of the Bible.

David is in bed with Abishag while the nation is in crisis. We might perhaps be reminded of his sin with Bathsheba when he was on his couch at the beginning while the nation was at war. However, this might also be a way of describing his weakness.

David is apparently lacking in sexual potency. He is not knowing the young beautiful woman who is lying in his bed. And this is related to his political impotency as the husband of the nation.

It might remind us also of the concubines who remained like widows after the return of David to Jerusalem. In the next chapter another man will try and take this woman Abishag for himself along with the kingdom. Seeing the weakness of his father, Adonijah, one of David's sons, tries to set himself up as king.

And this is all very reminiscent of Absalom. In 2 Samuel chapter 15 verse 1, the description of Absalom is more or less exactly the same as Adonijah here. After this, Absalom got himself a chariot and horses and 50 men to run before him.

Adonijah is described in his appearance as being attractive like Absalom. In 2 Samuel chapter 14 verse 25, Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him.

Adonijah is supported by Joab, who is probably the real power in the kingdom at this point, and now he is taking sides in a coup against David. He is also supported by Abiathar the priest. He invites key people, the king's sons and the royal officials of Judah, but he does not invite Nathan, Benaiah or the mighty men or Solomon.

The key loyalists of David are excluded. And this is indicative of a coup being staged. Certain members of the administration are going to be displaced by others.

Joab in particular has been a troublemaker for a long time. We should also be clear that Solomon has already been appointed as crown prince. Joab however seemed to resist the idea of Solomon being king from the very beginning.

Nathan, Bathsheba and Solomon reappear at this point, once again reminding us of the story of 2 Samuel. There is something of an emergency. A coup is underway, led by the most powerful men in the land, and the king is impotent.

He is lying in bed. Nathan and Bathsheba need to make a shrewd plan to rouse David to action. They need to do this for their own sake.

Adonijah would clearly perceive Bathsheba and Solomon as threats, and also Nathan. David had sworn an oath that Solomon his son should reign after him and sit on his throne. And Bathsheba and Nathan both come in to remind him of this promise in the way that they frame their statements.

Nathan instructs Bathsheba. He emphasises the contrast between David's promise and the reality, and maybe implies guilt on David's part that David has not prevented this from taking place. Bathsheba however, as she speaks to David, contrasts David's promise with the situation, focusing upon the fact that David does not know it.

David should, as the king and her husband, feel the sting of his lack of knowledge and his seeming inability to implement his word and his promise. Nathan at this point comes in. He feigns ignorance of David's involvement.

He asks whether David had orchestrated the situation. It would be a painful admission on David's part to acknowledge that the situation had risen entirely out of his control and apart from his plan. Adonijah's actions are described four times, and the contrasts are worth noting.

There are increasing references to details, and it is an elaboration in each account, and those greater elaborations are designed to spur David to action, and each time there's an added blow of the details. For instance, comparing the accounts of Bathsheba, followed by the account of Nathan. And now behold Adonijah as king, although you, my lord the king, do not know it.

He has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiath the priest, and Joab the commander of the army. But Solomon your servant he has not invited. In verses 18 to 19.

In verses 25 to 26, Nathan gives his account. For he has gone down this day and has sacrificed oxen, fattened cattle, and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's

sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiath the priest. And behold they are eating and drinking before him, and saying, Long live king Adonijah.

But me your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Ben-Nah the son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he has not invited. Bathsheba's account would be a blow, and then Nathan's account takes that even further. It adds details that would have made that blow hit harder.

There's no reference, however, in either of these accounts to the involvement of the royal officials. Bathsheba and Nathan are concerned to rouse David to action. They don't want to discourage him, to give him the sense that he cannot actually overcome this coup.

And if they mention the royal officials, it might be too discouraging a detail. It might make him think that Adonijah's coup is a done deal. Both Bathsheba and Nathan are very careful to allude to, or invert the words of David's promise made to Bathsheba concerning Solomon.

Both of them underline the promise that David himself has made by taking up its words and moving them around. The promise hadn't been given to Nathan, but Nathan inverts the promise to refer it to Adonijah to drive home the point. Have you said this? David's response is to reaffirm the promise to Bathsheba, and immediately to set the ball rolling to dispel all uncertainty and establish Solomon as his successor.

Adonijah is probably banking upon David's impotence at this point, and now that David has been spurred to action he will find that his plan soon evaporates. A public spectacle is needed to counter Adonijah's tempt at the throne. While Adonijah's feast seems to be restricted more to the leadership, especially of Judah, Solomon's anointing is more of a public spectacle, involving the blowing of a trumpet, a procession, an open celebration, loud music, and a triumphal entry into the city.

Adonijah and his men hear the noise of the celebration and wonder what is going on. Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, comes bearing the news of what's happening. Adonijah presumes that it is good news.

We might recall a similar episode back in 2 Samuel 18, when Ahimeaz, the son of Zadok, came bearing news of the victory over Absalom's coup from Joab to David. There might be a sort of ironic inversion here. Jonathan recounts all that David has done in publicly establishing Solomon as king.

Once again there is an elaboration of details in Jonathan's account, much as the news of Adonijah's feast had been developed in the tellings. And the force of this account leads Adonijah and his guests to depart in great fear. Adonijah flees for his life to the altar and takes hold of its horns, while his guests slink back to their homes.

Grabbing the horns of the altar was like running to a city of refuge in some sense. Solomon summons him and says that he will be spared if he proves faithful, but if he rebels he will be destroyed. This is Solomon's first action as king.

He shows clemency at this point, but he will also be firm in his judgement if Adonijah tries anything. Solomon's firm hand over his administration marks an immediate contrast between him and David. David, in his elderly state, is not able to run his kingdom.

He does not know what is going on. He is not able to master things or to keep his promises, simply because people are not observing his word. Solomon, however, immediately proves himself to be effective.

A question to consider. Why do you think that the author of the books of kings decided to begin his story with David weak and impotent in bed? How does beginning with this shape the character of the narrative of this chapter? Ephesians chapter 5 verses 18-33 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. In the second half of Ephesians chapter 5 Paul moves from more general moral teaching to Christians, to teaching specifically directed to different classes of persons within households, to wives, husbands, children, servants and masters. Here we find another example of the household codes of the New Testament.

A very similar example of such a code can be found in Colossians chapter 3-4. Indeed, the very movement of Paul's argument here, from a discussion of God's indwelling

through song to a household code, is the same as we find there. There is much in these codes that seems very similar to what one might find in non-Christian household codes of the time.

However, while much might appear very similar on the surface, when one lifts the bonnet or the hood and examines what is beneath it, one can observe that the engine and much else has been completely switched out. It works according to very different principles. Paul contrasts being drunk with wine with being filled with the Spirit.

Both are things that change your state, and he makes similar points here to Colossians chapter 3 verse 16. In both cases he is talking about a form of being filled, and the parallels are instructive. Being filled with the Spirit is paralleled with the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly.

And in both cases this is achieved or expressed in the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs - the expression of joy in our hearts, the way that the Word of God in the form of song conscripts our heart's desires and encourages us to be people who meditate and memorise the Word of God, who hold it within our hearts as something to delight in and to reflect upon. This, for Paul, is what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. And in both cases continual and extensive thanksgiving is the purpose of it all.

In continual thanksgiving the self continually renders itself back to God in gratitude for God's gifts. Verse 21 is a transitional verse. It moves from Paul's teaching concerning being filled with the Spirit onto his instruction in the household code.

There's a reference to submitting to each other. While there might be a sort of mutual submission, it clearly isn't symmetrical. What it means varies by person and context, and Paul goes on to explore this in the sections that follow.

The shape of what submission means for the child differs from what it means for the wife or the servant. However, there may also be the suggestion that husbands, fathers and masters also need to exercise a sort of submission appropriate to the nature of their relationships, relationships where submission would not usually be included as an element. Their authority is not denied, but it may be radically reconfigured.

Rather than lording it over others, they should act out of consideration for others, serving each other in love, following the teaching of Philippians 2, verses 3-4. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

And of course, this follows the example of Christ. Submission to others occurs out of reverence for Christ. This is not grounded in the natural claims of the other party so much as in honouring our Lord.

Such mutual concern and privileging of the interests of the other party would completely transform the dynamics of the relationship, even when the essentially hierarchical structures are maintained and even positively affirmed by Paul. Wives are charged to be subject to their husbands as an expression of their appropriate service to the Lord Jesus. The relationship here is not just about, or perhaps not even primarily about, the private relationship of the couple themselves, but about the broader posture of the wife to her husband within the life of the household and its surrounding community.

She should honour and show deference to him in the way that she relates to him personally and privately and speaks of him to others. Mature persons who are under the guardianship of others should be concerned to show them due honour and deference, to be responsive to them, and through encouragement and respectful candour to help them to fulfil their duties to us well. Paul is not here teaching a slavish obedience, but a willing self-subjection.

And he draws a parallel between Christ's headship and the husband's headship. We should think back to Paul's earlier description of Christ's headship in 1.20-23. We can easily think of headship, without recognising its character, more as something exercised over us on our behalf. We are to be subject to our head, but our head's authority is exercised in a way that strengthens us, rather than suppressing us.

It makes all the difference that our head, Jesus Christ, is seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, placed over all other rules, authorities, powers and dominions. This authority is exercised in a loving manner on our behalf. As we submit to it, we are empowered by it.

Paul draws a parallel between Christ being the head of the Church and being its saviour as his body. As the saviour of the body, he is the one who acts on its behalf and delivers it and provides for it. The husband has been charged to act towards his wife as Christ acts towards his bride the Church.

Consequently, it is important that the woman or the wife respond to him accordingly. The husband's position relative to his wife is not merely by virtue of his greater power, but also by virtue of the Lord's intention, and she must honour that. Husbands must follow the example of Christ.

While Christ is clearly over the Church, he willingly places the interests of the Church ahead of his own and gives himself up for her. He does not lord it over the Church. Note that Paul never says that the husband is to exercise authority over his wife.

Rather, the instruction is to love, an instruction that is repeated in three ways. The wife should give in her willing subjection what many unworthy husbands were inclined to demand and to coerce, and the husband in his initiative of love should give what many wise would be desperate to obtain and would try to manipulate. Christ is not subservient

to the Church, but he manifests humility in the way that he acts towards her.

He is the Lord of the Church, but his lordship is one that ministers to the Church. He is presented as washing his bride. His bride is not perfect, but his loving gift of himself and his service of the Church will bring out the Church's beauty.

Both wives and husbands should see themselves as loving servants of their spouse, seeking not to manipulate or control, but through their respect and love accentuating and eliciting those virtues and those things that are good or glorious in their spouse. The washing of water is a sort of washing of the bride to prepare her for her husband. Here Christ himself humbly performs this for his bride, and a reference to baptism should not be difficult to recognize.

The intense unity and intimacy of marriage should break down the competing interests that are so often pitted against each other within it, as Wendell Berry has powerfully expressed it. Marriage, in what is evidently its most popular version, is now on the one hand an intimate relationship involving, ideally, two successful careerists in the same bed, and on the other hand a sort of private political system in which rights and interests must be constantly asserted and defended. Marriage, in other words, has now taken the form of divorce, a prolonged and impassioned negotiation as to how things shall be divided.

During their understandably temporary association, the married couple will typically consume a large quantity of merchandise and a large portion of each other. The modern household is the place where the consumptive couple do their consuming. Nothing productive is done there.

Such work as is done there is done at the expense of the resident couple or family, and to the profit of suppliers of energy and household technology. For entertainment, the inmates consume television or purchase other consumable diversion elsewhere. There are, however, still some married couples who understand themselves as belonging to their marriage, to each other, and to their children.

What they have they have in common, and so to them, helping each other does not seem merely to damage their ability to compete against each other. To them, mine is not so powerful or necessary a pronoun as ours. This sort of marriage usually has at its heart a household that is to some extent productive.

The couple, that is, makes around itself a household economy that involves the work of both wife and husband, that gives them a measure of economic independence and self-employment, a measure of freedom, as well as a common ground and a common satisfaction. Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, recognising that they are one flesh with them. To love and minister to the needs of your wife is to strengthen yourself.

The married couple are to recognise that fundamental unity. The subjection of the wife to the husband is not the surrender of power to another party, but a willing yielding and deference to one by whom she is to be strengthened. The love of the husband is not the wasteful squandering of his strength and attention upon another party.

The husband isn't what some have called a simp. His loving ministering to his wife is ultimately a building up of himself as one flesh with her. Throughout all of this, Paul cannot help but show the gravitational force that Christ and his redemption exerts upon his thinking concerning this and all other matters.

Even when talking about husbands and wives, he is constantly talking about Christ and his redemption. Our relationships are modelled after Christ and ordered to the service of Christ. Indeed, Paul suggests that the fundamental text concerning marriage in Genesis chapter 2 verse 24 is ultimately about Christ and the Church.

In Christ we discover that marriage was always a type of something greater, of the unity of Christ and the Church. The unity of husband and wife in marriage is not just a metaphor, but is a created type of the union of the son and his bride that comes at the very climax of history. A question to consider.

Paul's vision of marriage is one of profound asymmetrical reciprocity, where husbands and wives stand in very different kinds of relationship to each other, yet both put the other before themselves and in the manner proper to their positions are able to serve each other in love. What are some of the ways in which the biblical teaching here and elsewhere challenges many of our cultural notions of marriage?