



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

3rd November, 2023

"What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"

2 Samuel 9:8

Many tragic images and stories come from the ongoing world conflicts and migrant crises. Who can forget the picture of the little boy lying dead on a Turkish beach, then cradled gently in the arms of a grim-faced officer? Another tragic story sticks in my mind: a young Rohingya refugee mother from Myanmar landed at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh clutching her infant and few belongings. A woman on the jetty offered to hold the baby while the girl clambered ashore. When she looked around the woman had vanished with the child, never to be seen again. Unimaginable pain. One person's plight is another's wicked profit.

The Bible has a story with some similarities from the conflict between Israel and the Philistines (1 Samuel 31) and the subsequent war of succession (2 Samuel 2-3); shockingly brutal times (2 Samuel 4) (*comparable with Israel/Palestine today*). There were refugees then: a nurse in Saul's household, hearing of his defeat, rushed out, pulling Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son (Saul's grandson) with her. The little boy (aged 5) fell and -we assume- broke or dislocated both ankles (2 Samuel 4:4). He must have been through an agonising time, during which his bones set misaligned, and he was (as the RSV has it) *"crippled in his feet"*.

He disappears from the scene, and some years later it occurs to King David to *ask* *"Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"* (2 Samuel 9:1). Mephibosheth had been a refugee since his father's death, given asylum in Lo Debar (in modern Jordan) (2 Samuel 9:4). He was the remnant of Saul's wiped-out family, perhaps considering himself to be still in mortal danger from David; and by this time he had a son, Mika (2 Samuel 9:12). He must have received the summons from the royal court with great trepidation, but David wants to honour him because of his pact with Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:3 and 20:17). This brings us to some of Mephibosheth's very few words: *"What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"* (2 Samuel 9:8).

He is our 'walk-on' character. I feel sometimes that I am -we are- spiritual 'refugees' in a threatening world, not just in the sense of persecution and opposition (many experience that acutely), but in the sense of being victims of our fallenness, casualties with spiritual injuries, refugees from *"spiritual forces"* (Ephesians 6:12), maybe even filled with self-loathing. Do you ever feel like Mephibosheth: *"What (am I) that you should notice a dead dog like me?"*

We have an ongoing invitation from God, but perhaps we're like the prodigal seeking 'asylum' with trepidation. But *"God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8). We cannot make ourselves fit for the presence of God, any more than Mephibosheth could heal his feet and expunge his ancestry to approach King David.

But let's re-think 2 Samuel 9:7: *"Don't be afraid,"* God says to us, *"for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of my Son, Jesus Christ."*