

# Part of God's plan



Gillian Cooper *reflects on* 2 Samuel 1:1. 17-end

**K**ing Saul and his son Jonathan are dead. Their death has long been inevitable, because God has withdrawn his blessing from Saul and placed it on David. It is excruciating to read the long story of the charmed life of David and his rising popularity, set against the sad decline of poor doomed Saul into despair and madness. Now the agony is over. Saul and Jonathan have been killed in battle. David is not king yet, though of course he soon will be. In the next chapter of 2 Samuel we will be plunged once more into tales of power struggles and assassinations before David can finally be crowned. But now we pause, for a lament that has captured the imagination of readers down the ages.

"Tell it not in Gath" lest there should be rejoicing. Let the place where they died stay for ever dry and barren. Let everyone weep. "How the mighty have fallen!" The beloved and lovely have died, and their strength and courage have died with them.

We may wonder about David's sincerity. He has not openly opposed Saul, but nor has he discouraged his own adulation by the people. David's motives, however, are not the point. This is a story of God at work. God's people look back through their history and they know God wanted David to be their king. Saul is a mere footnote. It is David who is God's choice, and part of God's plan of salvation. ☺

Be with us, Lord, in our world full of violence and grief, laughter and joy. Be present as we mourn and as we rejoice, that we may discern your presence in every aspect of our lives, and know ourselves blessed by your love. Amen.

## Fruits of the Spirit

– a meditation on Galatians 5:22-23

by Caroline Hodgson

*Caroline Hodgson concludes her series about the Fruits of the Spirit, by examining what a grape can teach us about self-control.*

We've been thinking about the fruits of the spirit, and now we turn our attention to the spirits of the fruit. Since biblical times humans have had an uneasy relationship with the grape and its product, wine. This potent liquid – the blood of Christ we imbibe at the Eucharist – has the power to turn people into jibbering, even violent idiots. Those who witnessed the

amazing events of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21), initially assumed the disciples were drunk. But they hadn't lost self-control – they had surrendered it to the Holy Spirit.

Surrendering to the Holy Spirit is nothing like being drunk. It doesn't have to take the form of shouting, swaying or tongues – it can happen through quiet prayer – but it is a powerful, intoxicating force. And in order for the Holy Spirit to work through us we must learn to exercise self-control. That doesn't mean giving up everything we enjoy, but it does involve prioritising the Holy Spirit over our earthly desires and behaviours. ☺

“ We must have a spirit of power towards the enemy, a spirit of love towards men, and a spirit of self-control towards ourselves.”

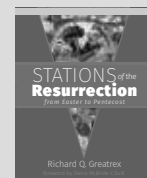
Watchman Nee (1903-1972), Chinese church leader and Christian teacher

## The Eucharist Part IV, the medieval period

by Richard Greatrex

In the medieval Church the idea of Christ present in bread and wine flourished, although the general congregation began to receive communion less frequently. Shifting the altar from its central position among the people to a separate, screened-off space led to exclusivity. Only those deemed worthy were now graced by reception of the sacred elements.

While initially only bishops presided at the Eucharist, as Christianity spread local priests took over the role. By the medieval period priests were praying the liturgy for and not with the people, using Latin, a language the majority didn't understand, saying the most sacred texts inaudibly, often out of sight. The congregation was reduced to passive observers who received communion twice a year only, and even then they were denied the wine in case it was spilled. Matters were ripe for change. ☺



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