I found the readings very exciting. As I thought about them I felt that in a strange way David and Paul, although some 2000 years apart, had a number of things in common and that we some further 2000 years apart followed a similar pattern

DAVID. We first meet David as a shepherd. The Lord had instructed Samuel to go to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as the next king of Israel. Jesse called each of David’s elder brothers in turn, but they were not the chosen one. When Jesse sent for David who had been caring for his father’s sheep Samuel anointed him at the Lord’s instruction.

David entered King Saul’s service and when the King had “an evil spirit” David soothed him by playing on his harp and singing to him. As we are completing Mental Health week it is unfortunate that the Bible translators still use the phrases “possessed of demons” or “having an evil spirit” which has caused so much taboo regarding mental disorder over the years. We don’t know what the King’s problem was, but it is clear he suffered from some form of illness (possibly depression or bipolar??). To the best of my knowledge that is the first recording of music therapy being used in treating mental illness – and is a continuing therapy today. Perhaps the most known event about David is his killing Golliath and over the years he proved to be a very competent soldier to such an extent that King Saul became very jealous of him. Although the King made no secret of his wish to kill David on at least one occasion David could have taken the King’s life he would “not harm the Lord’s anointed.” When Saul died David was crowned King and his memory is still revered in Israel. However, like all humans he was prone to sin and he sinned BIG. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then organised the murder of her husband, Uriah, He displeased God because of a lack of parenting skills. He was quick to acknowledge his wrongs and was confident of God’s forgiveness. In the reading from 2nd Samuel David almost becomes a prophet as he looks forward to the coming of the Messiah.

PAUL or Saul as we first knew him was very proud of the fact that he was a tent maker and that he never accepted any monies during his missions. A very religious Pharisee, he firmly believed that the new Christian movement was a danger to Judiasm and to the work of God. Because of this ideal he persecuted Christians without mercy and there is no doubt that he approved of and witnessed Stephen’s stoning. As he was going to Damascus he was transformed after being challenged by the Lord. We must note that he did not change his ideals – he continued to work for God but now as a Christian. He often spoke of his sorrow as he remembered his persecution of Christians, sought God’s forgiveness and was confident that it had been granted. In his letters he wrote of having “a thorn in the flesh”. He never did say what that was but clearly it gave him much mental anguish. Many people have considered it to be some form of epilepsy, possibly for the manner he had a form of “fit” during his conversion experience. In the reading from Ephesians Paul prays that they will come to know Christ better; He looks back at Jesus’ life and advises them to use that as a role model.

US. I noted that all our “clergy team”, like David and Paul, had previous occupations – our Vicar John a chemist, Curate Steph with a circus and Pastoral Assistant Judith a nurse.

I served some 30 years working with people with mental disorder and some with physical disabilities and their carers. In a way we look forward and back. Back through the Bible at Jesus’ life and forward to his second coming. We rejoice at God’s forgiveness through Jesus’ death and resurrection when we TRULY repent. I must admit that my main stumbling block is in forgiving myself, as one of my previous parishioners said “I have punished myself over and over again by my conscience.

Once again I conclude with a quote from the BCP: O Lord show thy mercy upon us. And grant us thy salvation Amen