

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church - 30 August 2020

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God.

**Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name;
make known among the nations what he has done.**

**Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of His wonderful acts.**

Glory in His holy name;

let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

Psalm 105 vv1-4

**Hymn StF 87 Praise to the living God!
All praised be his name**

Prayer of Adoration

O God, maker of all things, lover of all people,
your presence is with us always, around us and within us.
You are the source of our life, and without you we and all things would cease to be.
You alone are real: everything else derives its reality from you.
Help us to worship you with mind and heart and with all the power of our being;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Father eternal, Giver of light and grace,
We have sinned against you and against our fellow men,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love, and we have marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins.

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us,
and lead us from darkness to walk as children of light. **Amen**

Let us join in the Lord's Prayer. Our Father

Readings

Today we have one long reading divided into two parts. It is the story of Moses and the Burning Bush

First Reading

Exodus 3.1-15

First Address

Moses was having an ordinary day, looking after the flock of sheep of his father in law, Jethro. Moses had been brought up as a prince of Egypt by Pharaoh's daughter. But now he was in exile in the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula. Meanwhile his fellow Israelites were toiling for the Egyptians as slaves, making bricks and doing other hard manual work.

Moses had tried to rescue his fellow Israelites from slavery in Egypt. One day he happened to see an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Glancing this way and that and seeing no-one, he killed the Egyptian overseer and hid the body in the sand. This was soon discovered. Pharaoh was angry and Moses had to flee for his life to the desert.

Then, on this ordinary day, something caught his attention. It was a burning bush. It was on fire but it didn't burn up. So he went closer to see. Suddenly God called his name from within the bush. Moses realised that it was God calling. What a strange moment that must have been! I guess that it was very frightening.

What happened next was even more frightening. God told him to take off his sandals, as the place where he was standing was holy ground. It was holy because God was there. As a similar sign of respect to God, Muslims today take off their shoes when entering a mosque.

God told Moses who he was – "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob". At this Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Then God told Moses why He was speaking to Moses. He had chosen Moses to free the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and to lead them to the promised land – Israel - a land flowing with milk and honey – where they would be free.

I want us now to look at the conversation that followed between Moses and God. Moses was afraid of God, but he was even more afraid of the task he was being given. What did Moses say to God?

Moses said that he was totally inadequate for this enormous task. For it was an enormous task – to go to the autocratic ruler of one of the most powerful states of the time and to just ask, *ask*, that the Pharaoh set free thousands of his slaves to go where they wished.

Moses had been prepared for the task by being brought up in Egypt, so he knew the language and customs of Egypt. Furthermore, he had actually been brought up in the palace, so he knew how a Pharaoh should be approached. But now Moses was just a refugee fleeing from punishment

So Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

God replied "I will be with you". God promised that Moses would come back to this mountain and worship God there again, this time with all the freed Israelites.

Well, this didn't reassure Moses at all. So he asked God for His name.

When we ask someone to tell us their name, we begin to enter into a relationship with them. Often it is just a casual acquaintance, but I think that we all know that giving someone our name is a step towards becoming closer to that person.

Also, remember that Moses had been brought up in Egypt. The Ancient Egyptians worshipped many different gods – Amun, Osiris, Horus, Isis etc. By asking God for His name, Moses was asking what sort of god He was.

God replies "I AM WHO I AM". So

- our God is not defined by what He does. He is not a God of thunder, or a God of the crops, or a God of war
- our God is the ground of all being. He is: He will be. The word in Hebrew translated here as "I AM" or as "I AM WHO I AM" could also be translated as "I WILL BE"

You may like to know that the four Hebrew letters used for "I AM" are "YHWH". In newer translations of the Bible these four letters are translated as Yahweh. In older translations of the Bible they are written as Jehovah. However, most translations of the Bible follow the Jewish tradition of not calling God by His chosen name but by referring to Him as "the LORD" as a sign of our respect.

We do the same when we refer to our Queen by her title rather than use her name. We use a title such as "the Queen" or "our Sovereign" rather than just calling her "Elizabeth".

So in this conversation God took an enormous step in revealing to Moses, and to us, who He is. Let us think about that as we sing

**Hymn 20 Be still,
 for the presence of the Lord,
 the Holy One is here;**

Second Reading

**We continue with the conversation between God and Moses
Exodus 4. 1-17**

Second Address

Moses was having an ordinary day, looking after the flock of sheep of his father in law, Jethro. Then he noticed a bush that was on fire but that wasn't being burnt up....

God took the extraordinary step of speaking to Moses because He wanted Moses to do an extraordinary thing. He told Moses to go and rescue his people from slavery in Egypt. Moses was to do that by asking, *asking*, Pharaoh to let the slaves go free.

Was Moses the right person for this extraordinary task? Moses didn't think so. In our first reading and address we saw Moses objecting twice to what God was wanting him to do.

First Moses protested to God "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?"

Next Moses asked God's name. God told Moses His Almighty Name "I AM WHO I AM".

But by now Moses wasn't really listening to God. Moses was listening to the voice in his own head that said, "You can't do this. You are going to fail. You are going to fail just as you did last time when you killed the Egyptian overseer. That didn't lead to everyone making you their leader. It led to you living out here in the desert, scrabbling to earn a living by looking after someone's sheep."

Before we go further into this conversation between God and Moses I want us to step back for a moment and ask, why is all this recorded in the Bible?

Incidentally, I wonder whether this conversation as recorded in the Bible is actually the distillation of an exchange of thoughts between God and Moses stretching over several days or weeks. It has been written down as a conversation to compress that process of inspiration and objection into a form that is easy to read.

Does Moses appear in this story as a bit of a wimp? Or can we recognise something of ourselves in this narrative of God calling and the human saying "I can't, I can't"?

Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of this story is that God chose to work through this person to achieve a mighty purpose. Or perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of this story is that Moses answered God back – yet was still tasked with freeing the Israelites from slavery.

We return to the story to find Moses protesting to God again – his third protest. "What if [the elders of Israel] won't believe me or listen to me? What if they say 'The LORD never appeared to you'?"

So then God showed Moses two signs that he could use to convince the elders that he Moses should be their leader. God didn't just tell Moses, He got Moses to act out the signs.

First, Moses threw down his shepherd's staff and it turned into a live snake. God told Moses to grab the snake's tail and it turned back into a shepherd's staff. Next God got him to put his hand inside his cloak and it came out white as snow, like leprosy. When Moses put his hand back inside his cloak again then it was healthy again.

Thirdly God told Moses that he could perform another sign, this time using water from the river Nile, the river that flows through Egypt. The third sign was to pour the water onto the dry ground. The water would then turn into blood on the ground.

Next Moses protested that he had never been a good speaker, that he was slow of speech. At this, God shows signs of becoming impatient. God says "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say".

But still Moses protests. This is his fifth query of God. Moses just says "O Lord, please send someone else"

"O Lord, please send someone else to do it". The cry rings down the ages "Send someone else". "Not me".

Sometimes in religious literature one gets the impression that God has only to ask and every Christian immediately does His bidding. In reality, the cry of Moses, recorded here in Exodus, is, I think, much nearer the truth "O Lord, please send someone else"

How does God respond? He is annoyed with Moses and He pushes Moses into action. God tells Moses that He, God, has already arranged for Moses' brother Aaron to come and meet Moses in the desert. The two of them together, equipped with Moses staff, and with God's continuing help, are to begin the task.

That is the end of our story for today. What does the story mean for us? It tells us that God wants to work through us. That is the choice that God has made. It is what God prefers to do.

Moses made excuses because he felt inadequate for the job God asked him to do. It was natural for him to feel that way. He was inadequate all by himself. But God wasn't asking Moses to work alone. He offered other resources to help – God himself, Aaron, and the ability to work miracles.

God often calls us to do tasks that seem too difficult, but he doesn't ask us to do them alone. God offers us his resources, just as he did to Moses. We should not hide behind our inadequacies, as Moses did, but look beyond ourselves to the great resources available. Then we can allow God to use our unique contributions.

A Reflective Prayer:

Loving Father,

in a world of covid 19

please strengthen us to do your work.

Give us determination in restoring the work of this church; the services, the coffee mornings and all the other activities for the community that we have been doing.

Lord, we cannot at present see how this epidemic will end. Help us to take a little step forward each day to serve you and to help our community.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

There is a response to this prayer

Lord of all,

Response In your name we pray

Dear Lord,

fill your church with love and understanding,
so that she may show forth your gospel love.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

Fill your people with respect for each other,
a willingness to listen and a generosity to share.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

Enable us to listen to and help
all who suffer through injustice, disability or neglect.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May those who make decisions for us be so guided by you,

that they use their power wisely for the good of all.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May those who suffer in pain, loneliness or grief
know the power of your healing love.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray,

May we,
in all we do and say,
and in all we are and strive to be,
be filled with your loving power.

Lord of all,

In your name we pray, Amen

**Hymn: StF 463 Deep in the shadows of the past,
far out from settled lands,
some nomads travelled with their God
across the desert sands.**

Closing Prayers

God of creation,
you call all peoples of the earth into your kingdom.
Grant that we, with young and old of all nations,
may boldly confess Jesus Christ as Lord;
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and praise, now and for ever

Amen

Let us close our service by saying the grace together

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of
the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen**

This service was prepared by Angela Latham for East Leake Methodist Church.

The last paragraph of the address is taken from The Life Application Study Bible, New Living Translation
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