

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 19 March Faith struggles

Pray Pray that we would continue to be aware of God's presence in our midst even, and perhaps especially, when we are up against it and that we are not put off when we struggle with our faith.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Exodus 17:1-7.

Background In some ways, the high points of Moses' leadership are behind him. He has successfully led his people out of slavery in Egypt. God had confirmed his call to lead them to the Promised Land. However, out in the wilderness and recognising that, humanly speaking, their position was precarious and that danger and quite possibly death awaited them, the people railed against Moses and against God.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Why is it easy to forget just how hopeless things were before we turned to God? Try putting yourself in the people of Moses' shoes – to what extent were they "rewriting" history and cutting out their previous sufferings? How can we ensure that we don't do the same and forget how things would be without Jesus?
2. "It's today that matters, the here and now". Even if people don't use these exact words it is an outlook which is very common. Forget about the past, leave tomorrow for later, just concentrate on dealing with today's issues. How harmful was that outlook to the people in the wilderness? How did ignoring the past and the future and God make life more difficult? Think about nowadays – how might we fall into a similar trap? How might we avoid making the same mistake?
3. Jesus was refreshingly honest about the difficulties that his followers would face. Life as a Christian, then and now, is never going to be easy. Yet, sticking with Jesus is the only way to life in all its fullness. Why do we act as though everything should go swimmingly because we are believers? What damage do we do to ourselves and especially to newer Christians by giving that mistaken impression? Are we failures because we sometimes struggle with our faith? Because we come up against difficulties? How can we better get across the message that Jesus is with us always, through thick and thin?
4. There is more than a hint that Moses was perhaps turning a blind eye to the problems and difficulties. That is never a wise move. The psalms give us a huge clue that God really wants us to take our concerns to him in prayer – even if sometimes it means a moan – as long as it is a moan that is seeking solutions from God, that believes deep down that somewhere he is the answer. What more could we do to learn the lessons about prayer contained in the old hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus"? "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."
5. Finally, not without some badgering from his people Moses turns to God and is given a sign that God has not led them into the desert to perish. They are however going to have to trust God over the long term. There is to be no quick fix. The spirit of our age clamours after immediate solutions, instant answers. That is not God's way. How can we get across the message that God is in the business of long term trust, development of sustained love and character? How do we bridge the difference in outlook?
6. Discuss anything else arising from the passage or the service.

Prayer Lord, following you can be tough – but help us to hold fast to you, to seek your equipping and to be patient as you work out your purposes over the longer term. Teach us not to forego that for the benefit of short term gains. Amen.