

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 1 October 2017

Community is Hard Work

Pray Praise God that he stands by his people even when we are tempted to rail against him. Thank him that he is more than willing to forgive us, be patient with us and take time to draw us back to himself and lead us in the right paths.

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

Background It was always going to be tough for Moses and the people – not only the initial escape from Egypt but also once they got out into the desert and began their long (and tortuous) journey which would eventually lead them to the Promised Land. Indeed, it was going to take a lot longer than anyone ever imagined. That was years away – the difficulties were more pressing and immediate – food had been dealt with to some extent (we considered that last week) but water was to be a perennial problem – put simply – no water, no life. The people quickly forgot about their oppression in Egypt and began to complain – moaning against Moses and Aaron and against God himself. Notice Moses response – he prayed!

Possible questions/points to consider

1. There is no doubt that the people's escape from Egypt was a hugely significant deliverance and to this day is marked as a turning point in the history of God's dealings with them. However, it does appear that people imagined that once out of the clutches of Pharaoh and his warriors their lives would be relatively trouble-free. Why do people emerging from trouble tend to assume that "everything will be fine/rosy/dandy"? The people took it out on the leadership (Moses and Aaron) but also on God. How do we view moaning at God? What, positively, came out of it?
2. Oh what pains we often forfeit. Prayer is without doubt a tremendous gift to God's people yet we can be slow to make us of it. What factors come into play? Where trouble weighs us down and prayer seems to be heavy and difficult what can be done? How ready are we to pray? To ask others for prayer? To offer to pray for others?
3. Taking the issue of the escape from Egypt leading (arguably!) to yet more trouble. How do we deal with situations (for ourselves, the Church, for friends and neighbours) where it can appear that we are jumping out of the frying pan into the fire? We do tend to want instant answers when sometimes God's plan is more long term – eg developing character and faith not just the provision of instant solutions. How can we sense and respond to these deeper and more long term goals?
4. Conflict – "I want nothing to do with these church folks – they are always arguing!" How fair is this comment? Are there steps we can take to minimise conflict? Nip it in the bud without ignoring differences? How can we move towards "See how these Christians love one another?" Given that our faith is based on God's acceptance and forgiveness how should we seek to treat one another better? Someone has suggested that (as well as prayer) learning to listen to one another better can help greatly in dealing with conflict. What could we do to foster better listening in our congregation?
5. While God does work wonders in sorting out situations and peoples' disputes (and he provided the water here!!) conflict can do lasting damage to relationships and to the work of the gospel – though ignoring it and pretending it isn't there doesn't help either. How do we cope with conflict in the church? How do we deal with the ongoing stresses and strains and seek to place things in God's hands?
6. Anything else that arises from the passage or from the service.

Prayer Lord thank you that came to reconcile us to you (and to one another). Help us to you're your balm in our differences so that forgiveness and acceptance are to the fore. Amen.