



Waterrow Worship 27th March 2011

"may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight"

Our two readings today both Old Testament and New Testament are all about **faith, peace** and above all else **hope**. The first reading goes back to the deepest and oldest bible stories and continues the story of the Israelites as they search for God's promised kingdom. But it shows them getting into trouble again as there is no water. Understandably they are thirsty.

Looking for the simple solution they quarrelled at the local figure of authority, the man who has led them to where they were. I love the honesty of the bible here and particularly the line **"they grumbled against Moses"** if I am thirsty I sometimes grumble. But these people cannot think about anything else apart from the fact that they are thirsty a bit like a petulant child can only concentrate on the fact that they are thirsty rather than the fact that God said he would provide. They forget why or how they were there. They didn't have faith or hope; they didn't know how to deal with this situation.

The people complained amongst themselves about their problems rather than doing what God desired – remembering him. They forgot that God had said he would provide and asking through prayer. They had witnessed great miracles to get them to where they were but when they got a little bit thirsty they GRUMBLED instead of turning to the one who had already provided so much.

This must have been at an early stage in the development of Moses as one of God's great leaders. He had led the people out of Egypt and into relative safety but is obviously isn't the great forefather yet. What does he do when times are hard?

He isn't much better than the rest of them. He just complains to God rather than praying. And he sounds like a real simpleton to me **"They are almost ready to stone me"**! But long suffering and patient God obviously saw that Moses and the people needed a further example and asked Moses to gather the people around him when he cracked the rock and provided water for the people to drink.

Obviously Moses didn't know exactly what was going to happen but he did what he was told – he had faith. He obviously hadn't learnt to use it yet through prayer rather than simply whinging, but he did, he gets better and learns to trust in God and lead his people a little better.



The Israelites forgot to have faith and hope even though God has given them peace? Did they really believe God would go to all the trouble of the plagues, and getting them away from the chasing Egyptians, only to leave them to die in the desert? In just a short space of time they forgot to have faith. This shows how untrusting in Gods unfailing love and power the human race can be even when it has recently demonstrated directly to them. The Israelites needed to be retaught how to trust and communicate with God.

The second reading has a more difficult message but does also link back to the Old Testament reading. But we do need to remember that this is now Paul talking who needed to be and was a very different character to Moses. His faith seemed to be unswerving and completely upended after one, very personal, miracle from God.

Within the first part of the reading Paul points out that we have been justified through faith and have peace with God through Christ. But still the people are struggling to understand the true significance of this and Paul needs to complete their lesson. Paul also points out that we must glory in our suffering that it is OK to suffer hardship and suffering as suffering makes us stronger people.

The people, the Romans, who Paul was talking to, had terrible lives as they were persecuted for their faith and yet Paul tells them to have faith ***"its all good for you it will turn you into a better person and strengthen your character"***.

This is a message that is just as relevant to us today as it was then. The hardships we suffer aren't really that bad, especially compared to those experienced by the Israelites as they searched for the promised lands or the members of the early Christian church, all the same they will hurt and will affect us.

But if we have faith in God and the peace within us to know that God will save us experiencing hardship it will make us stronger people. We will be saved we are God's people and his love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. If we trust and believe in him then his holy spirit will help to see us through, and our faith, over time, will become stronger as a result.

It appears that the Israelites had to go through phase after phase of suffering, perhaps to strengthen perseverance, character and hence hope (to use Paul's words), to become a people who had hope in their God again



The next part of the reading is about how Jesus came to save us. We were weak and helpless because we could do nothing on our own to save ourselves. Someone had to come and rescue us and die for us to take our sins away. God sent Jesus Christ, his son to die for us and take our sins away not because we were good enough but because he loves us and we are his children.

We need to remember that God loves us more that we love him. When we feel uncertain about God's love for us we must remember that God loved us before we turned to him. The line "**while we were sinners**" is a great line. Paul isn't ruling himself out he is including himself as a sinner. Christ died for all of us sinners included. If God loved us when we were rebels he can surely strengthen us now that we love him in return.

God sent his only son to die for us and it reminds me of a question I was asked when I was confirmed not so many years ago. We were asked by the vicar if we would die for somebody - if we would give our lives for somebody.

Obviously being new fresh Christians we were all a little confused by this and what it the question meant and what they were trying to lead us to. The consensus in the group was that you wouldn't willingly die for somebody but that you would risk your life for somebody even a stranger. However it was concluded that when you became a parent your views on this were likely to change as other things become important in your life and perhaps you would give your life to your children. Jesus died for us because we are his children and he took our sins away for us, as a parent in some ways I can now understand this.

There is much suffering in the world at the moment Japan, Libya, etc. Lets just hope that through their suffering these people find and / or come closer to God.

To finish on a bright note - as some of you know next week I am going to Spring Harvest with my family next month. One of the best things that I find about being there is the shared peace and faith amongst such a large Christian community with shared views and beliefs. But it is all very well just being there the challenge that they try and set the attendees is in their strap line "**equipping the church for action**". With the aim that people will use the things they learn there in their daily lives, to bring them back to their churches, to go on mission, share the faith and above all else have a stronger faith in God. Let's hope that we can learn from the Israelites and the Romans and really make it happen this time.

Amen

Alan Swan
24th March 2011