

Sermon 28 September 2014 Exodus 17:1-7 Psalm 78: 1-4, 12-16 'Thanksgiving – remember'

Prayer: Lord teach us to remember with thanksgiving that at all times you are with us; in good times and bad, in times of plenty and in the wilderness you do not abandon or reject despite our grumbling, our lack of insight and our failure to trust your love. Amen

Albert Einstein defined insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” And it seems to me that without the teachers in our lives and the remembering of history this is exactly where we head – every time! The choice in this world is ours: insanity – or learning and remembering?

One of the traditions we have over and over here at St Johns is our annual season of thanksgiving, a time when we remember to give God thanks. We have since our early days made a financial gift of thanks to the Lord's work that is over and above our regular tithing / giving. This year we put our thanks offerings towards the establishment of a fund for the Children and Youth Leader's salary. There is more detail in the newsletter on this matter, and at St Johns we have been well blessed here by the level of giving the Lord does lay upon our hearts, so it is with real thanksgiving we observe this season.

Our theme of thanksgiving has been well matched with the Lectionary Scriptures. We have been following the ancient Hebrew people's story from being led out of slavery by Moses; as they ran on Passover night, as they discovered YHWH's pathway in the sea to escape Pharaoh's army; their lesson of trusting God's to provide enough food; and this week the echo of the lesson to trust God to provide enough water as they journey to the Promised Land. **Reasons** to give God thanks are sprinkled all through this experience of our ancient faith ancestors.

It is from them that we are taught to remember, remember and learn **and** step with confidence into the unknown of tomorrow – because of what God has done yesterday – and the day before that and.... And learn to remember with thanks because these signposts of God at work in the past – our past enable us to live now – and to look forward in time with hope.

Is that not the direction of the psalmist's words for us today? Remember, learn and tell the stories of what God has done, with praise. What has God done? Verses 12-16 tell of the events in their life that refer to their Exodus experience. At these points in their journey they saw – felt – knew the presence of God was visible among them. I sometimes call these 'signposts' – signposts in life which stand well clear of all the other memories and are I believe essential in faith's ability to 'hold' when a storm hits, and essential in faith's ability to grow into the unknown of the future.

They are more than just 'good' memories; they are essentials for us **and** for us to tell the children – with praise and thanks because of what God has done. *I don't know about you-* but I find it almost impossible to 'praise God' – without including 'thanking God'. Praise and thanks are closely linked that to do one is to invite the other 'in'. One of the purposes of memory 'signposts' is that they remind us of God's visible presence when God becomes invisible for whatever reason.

There are lots of ways we don't see God at work in our lives sometimes that is because God has a reason not known to us- maybe is unable to break through to us – maybe??? God-reasons but sometimes it is us that block God out / off – or we simply forget to give God thanks and praise. It is not only in the wilderness of our life that God can be invisible. God can become invisible when things are going well for us.

But – but *in fact, in Exodus 15:27, just before the manna story we had last week, the Israelites spent time in "Elim. Elim is where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water." In the comfort of this 'resting place' there is no mention about God's care – good or otherwise! There is no offering of praise or thanks for what is given. How many of us stop to say 'thank you Lord' for / in the good moments?

God can also be invisible for us when things are going badly. Today's Exodus text is when the people had no water and in country side like this we can understand their emotionally charged grumbles. ^{*1} This is not the first time they have 'murmured' and once again they "dispute" with Moses, about the lack of water. So despite very recent, hard evidence of God's providing them with enough to live, they complain that God has left, abandoned, rejected them and in their emotional state they blame Moses.

Emotion is a state that can render God invisible – today we see it not only in the people, but this is the moment of what I believe to be the saddest moment in Moses' story. Remember the people are worked up – thirsty for water, Their language reflects increasing desperation ^{*2} in chapter 16, they longed for the fleshpots of Egypt, as they themselves are starving. In chapter 17, it is not only they, who will perish, but also their children and **even their livestock!** Moses is trying to kill them they say, not surprisingly Moses is in fear of his life – from '**rock's**' being *thrown*.

^{*1} The Lord instructs Moses with what to do, so Moses did and struck "the rock in Horeb" and "water poured out of it for the people to drink." God was visible again for the people – but, **but despite** this spectacular display of God's goodness, Moses named the place "Testing and Dispute", "for the quarrelling of the Israelites, and the testing the Lord, asking: 'Is the Lord in our midst or not?'" and ***then Moses moved on.***

What he did not do was stop and give God thanks and praise. It was not Moses who enabled water, but God. The rocks that threatened Moses life were replaced by the rock that poured out water of life – and in the 'goodness' of the moment – God was forgotten and Moses made the substitution of himself as God. In the desert of sin, Moses sin was not to see God – as God and give God thanks and praise for providing 'enough' for life – even his, Moses life when *rocks for throwing* became **rock** split open with water. His punishment was that he never made it to the land of promise – he was allowed to see it!

I want to suggest that all of us here today know what it is to forget to see God and often it is when things are going well (lots of water!). But we also know of the wilderness times when provisions are few and far between and we need the 'hard' evidence of God's presence in our hands and in the delight and success of the moment – we moved right along.....

Giving thanks in the way we do here once a year – is special and important in the way we govern our life here at St Johns – but deeper still is a learning that giving praise and thanks is an attitude – a life attitude that we have to develop and grow within ourselves, our children, our community and world. It is an attitude that enables us to look back to see the signposts of God's presence in our lives when in a life moment of the invisibility of God – and it allows us to trust God's providing enough to keep walking confidently into the future knowing even if we can't see God – he is there and can see us!

Can we learn and remember what God has done and to give praise and thanks as the Psalmist teaches? Or are we just going to repeat the same thing over and over hoping for a different outcome? I pray not, I challenge you to reflect this week on your life sign posts and give God the praise and thanks. Amen.