

3BLYA11 Exodus 14v 15-25 Look Out! SPH 8 & 945

Today we reach the third of our sermons related to developing St Peter's Vision by considering the experiences of the Israelites in the Exodus.

Today it's 'Look Out!' ; the crossing of the Sea of Reeds.

Today, the people of Israel come to a point of no return in their journey – the crossing of the Sea of Reeds; just as Jesus came to a point of no return in his Ministry – he '*set his face' to go to Jerusalem*; just as we come to a point of no return (albeit a considerably easier one) – to sign up for one of the Vision Groups meeting during Lent to help discern **together** God's Vision for St Peter's.

You all probably know the story of the Exodus well, especially today's instalment.

The Children of Israel left slavery in Egypt disunited and grumbling. Their period of exploitation was at an end; God had freed them in a dramatic way. How **would** they cope no longer doing what *others* demanded of them, but finding out **for themselves** what the Will of God is, and then doing it?

At the first sign of problems (pursuit by Pharaoh's army), [you guessed it], they grumbled again and wanted to go back to things as they used to be (Ex.14 v11-12). Note that: **Familiarity provides a comfortable place to be, even if it is not where God wants you to be.**

Trapped between Pharaoh's pursuing army and the Sea of Reeds, it was clear that the point of no return had come. It must have looked to them like a choice between either being captured (and perhaps slaughtered) or being driven into the sea.

But help was at hand, **God continued to lead them** by speaking to

Moses, their leader. God told **him** what to do. As Moses stretched out his hand to point his people to go forwards towards the sea, God did the impossible and parted the waters for them to cross.

Bishop Michael Baughen, when Bishop of Chester, used to regularly point out to his Diocese that it was **as** the Israelites began to move forward and to enter the sea that the waters parted. The Israelites had to move **first, not** the sea: They had to get their toes into the water. The lesson Michael Baughen drew **for us all** is that **God supports us**, at times miraculously, **when we show commitment in deciding to do God's will; but the first move is always ours.**

And so, the Israelites crossed the sea bed **together** as **one** community of **all** ages. This was the beginning of their **formation** as a community of faith, a process which continued during their wanderings for years in the Wilderness, until they were a **well-prepared** community and **ready** to receive God's Vision of the Promised Land at Mount Nebo.

It's hard to imagine a mixed community of all ages crossing a sea bed, **without helping each other and encouraging each other.** Maybe this is where **all** community-building starts; in helping and encouraging each other to follow God's will.

Note that crossing high and dry was reserved for **their** community; Pharaoh's pursuing army became stuck-in-the-mud and was washed away by the returning waters.

Safe on the other shore, the Community of Israel was ready to face **together** their new phase of community life in, what was for them, **unfamiliar territory.**

In today's Gospel reading we discover that for Jesus there was also a point of no return in his Ministry.

Jesus spent a lot of his early ministry in rural areas to the North of Jerusa-

lem. According to Luke's Gospel, he had quite a successful following there as an itinerant preacher and teacher, **in that territory**.

- He taught his followers there
- He commissioned his disciples to preach and to heal there
- He fed the 5000 there, and spoke to his disciples of his coming death
- And Jesus was Transfigured there, on Mount Tabor, and the Voice of God again bore witness to his Divinity "*This is my Son, my chosen, listen to him*", just as at his Baptism in the Jordan.

Jesus could have stayed teaching and preaching to his people in **familiar territory**, but the time came when Jesus knew he had to turn his back on all of these things. He'd reached a point of no return. He knew that he had to leave his successful Ministry behind, and to do something he seemed quite reluctant to do. He '**set his face to go to Jerusalem**', to go from a place of success into a place of **unpredictability** and **vulnerability**, which proved to be **even more successful** in delivering the Will of God.

Jesus resolved to go forward, come what may; he 'set his face' to go to Jerusalem. Note the effect on those around him: our Gospel tell us that some were inhospitable (v53); some sought to follow him (v57); some sought to delay (v59); some wanted to tidy all loose ends first (v61): **but Jesus would brook no delay**. His sights were on the future in Jerusalem. Those who follow him are not to look back; but, like him, to look to the **greater success** of the future, come what may (v62).

What then are we to learn from these two stories for ourselves as we journey individually and as God's community into God's vision for **us**?

I guess we have all had points of no return in our lives; **good** ones as well as **bad**

- Perhaps a marriage [good]
- Perhaps an operation [bad]
- Perhaps a bereavement
- Perhaps a career change
- Perhaps retirement [hooray!].

Change for us has sometimes been 'out of slavery' (like the Israelites) and sometimes 'out of success' (like Jesus). **But we have moved forward out of a conviction that we were doing what was right in the circumstances.**

There are times when **each of us knows** what it is we must do, whether we like it or not: **And we too** either go forward joyfully, or '*set our faces*' to do as we must.

It is the same for us **corporately** as the Church Community at St Peter's. What is important is this conviction, **across our community**, that we are doing what is **right**, what **God** wants for us.

St Peter's Vision process is a chance for **all** of us **together** to find out what is the right way forward for us as a Church, to discern **God's** way forward for us all, **so that** we can journey onwards together, helping each other, in the confidence that **we** are doing God's will.

So **please do** join one of our Vision Groups for Lent; **please do** move from the **successful** ministry which **St Peter's has already enjoyed** to the uncertain, but even more successful, future ministry God has in store for us; **please do now** put **your** toe into the water and watch God provide for **you** as **together**, helping each other, we seek his Vision for the future.

...And please, don't get stuck in the mud!

Amen.

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