

## **NAURC Worship at Ipswich Rd**

**Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

### **Readings and Reflections**

#### **Bridget:**

##### **1st Reading Exodus 12 verses 1-14**

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, <sup>2</sup>“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. <sup>3</sup>Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. <sup>4</sup>If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. <sup>5</sup>The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. <sup>6</sup>Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. <sup>7</sup>Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. <sup>8</sup>That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. <sup>9</sup>Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. <sup>10</sup>Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. <sup>11</sup>This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.

<sup>12</sup>“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup>The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

<sup>14</sup> “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.

#### **Reflection**

At the beginning of lockdown I set myself a challenge. I decided that I would read the Bible straight through from beginning to end reading 2 or 3 chapters every day. Now I know that everyone says that is not the way to read the bible. It is a library of books and not designed to be read in sequence. Throughout my life I’ve read most books of the Bible, have even studied some of them in depth but who in the world has read Habbakuk or Zephaniah?!

Well of course I didn’t get very far before I came to a stumbling block. The first 5 books of the Bible known as the Pentateuch are full of accounts of God smiting the enemies of the Israelites. The passage I just read of the first Passover tells of God killing the firstborn sons of all the Egyptians. Admittedly Pharaoh had tried Moses’ patience by

agreeing several times to free the Israelites and then withdrawing his permission but this does seem a little drastic. Throughout the books of Exodus, Joshua and Judges, the same message comes across. If the Israelites keep to the law good things will naturally follow. If they turn away from God they will be punished. This punishment will take the form of defeat by their enemies. Even the psalm I read at the beginning of the service, which starts so beautifully has a sting in the tail. It speaks of inflicting vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples!

No wonder our good friend Paul Blake used to say that he would never preach a sermon based on the Old Testament!

How can we reconcile our experience of a loving God with what we read in the Old Testament? What are we to make of these tales of violence and bloodshed? I suggest that we need to understand the context in which these books are written. We must look at the timeframe, the audience and the purpose of the books of the Pentateuch.

God made a covenant with Abraham that if he remained faithful to God Abraham would be given a land to live in, numerous descendants and blessing for himself and through him all the nations of the earth. Each time God appears to the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua and so on, the promises are made more elaborate and more specific. Obedience and faithfulness were embedded in this covenant and in the covenant with Moses, which followed. Obedience and faithfulness ensured Israel's future blessing and prosperity. Disobedience led to infertility, crop failure, loss of God's presence and eventually exile in a foreign land. Each time the Israelites turned away from God they were punished.

The Israelites were God's chosen people. He vowed to bring them out of Egypt and to protect them as they journeyed to the promised land. God was violent towards the enemies of the Israelites to ensure that his holy race survived and thrived. All God asked in return was for the people to remain faithful to him. The book of Joshua demonstrates that fidelity to the law led to successful conquest of the land while Judges and Kings show that when the Israelites turned away from God defeat by her enemies ensued. Israelites failure to keep the law put her at risk of experiencing the divine punishment set out in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

The idea of the link between action and reaction might seem simplistic to our sophisticated 21<sup>st</sup> century minds. However we should also remember the words of Exodus c. 34 The Lord is a merciful God slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. As we read the Old Testament we see that time and time again God forgave his people and gave them another chance.

That same God who forgave the sins of his people long ago is present in our lives ready to guide our paths through life and to pick us up every time we fall, every time we fall short of his plan for us. The Israelites were a pilgrim people leaving Egypt at the start of an adventure of faith. We are also a pilgrim people with a destination. We are part of that holy nation, a people set apart for God.

All he asks is that we remain faithful to him. That isn't much to ask for so great a gift is it

## Audrey

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Romans Chapter 13 verses 8-14

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. <sup>11</sup> Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup> the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; <sup>13</sup> let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Reading: Matthew 18 15-20

<sup>15</sup> "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

### Reflection

When we started thinking about this service, without looking at them, Bridget and I decided to use the lectionary readings for today as our base. I was really grateful to Bridget for constructing a basic order of service. She suggested that she would lead the first part, based on the Old Testament Reading and I should do the second, based on the New Testament readings. I wasn't so happy though when I read the two New Testament readings which you have just heard! Then I read them again and 3 sentences sprung out at me:

*From Romans: Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

*And*

*"Love your neighbour as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

*From Matthew: <sup>19</sup> Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*

The nitty gritty detail, the quotations from the commandments, the instructions how to make your peace with someone you have fallen out with, don't matter-that will come naturally if we love one another and ask God's help in all we do.

That was the content of the instruction from Paul to the Romans at the end of that reading: *"Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; ..... Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."*

Life in Rome in those days seems horrendous with all the negatives which Paul dictated-but remember, this was to a people who had only vaguely heard of Christ, people without radio, TV, internet -they had an excuse to not know that there was another way. Sadly our news channels today are full of stories which suggest that there are many people in the world today to whom Paul's negative words might still apply-and they don't have the excuse of the Romans that they didn't know there was another way-or do they? Have they not heard that loving your neighbour leads to a better life for all?

I thought I'd have a quick look at some local and national news:

Who is loving their neighbour in these scenarios?

- The councillor who says that families in dire poverty need no extra support because it's already provided by the state or the rich footballer who has gone out of his way to use his position in life to organise support for these same families?
- The person joining a rally which is objecting to restrictions to protect us, who is in close proximity to others and refuses to wear a mask or the person who cannot afford a face mask, but purchases one and adheres to the rules so that they restrict passing on any infection to others?
- The person joining a rave or similar or the person not visiting family or close friends in case they pass on possible infection?
- The person buying up large quantities of household goods to protect themselves, or the person donating to the foodbank to help others?
- The person denigrating someone due to the colour of their skin or the language they speak or the person working to help others in a refugee camp, hospital, local community?
- The person who leaves their rubbish around for others to clear up, with probable damage to both humans and the environment or the person collecting said rubbish in a voluntary capacity

It is so easy to make a list-it's not the list Paul gives-but it's modern day problems which have the same effect on society today-ie they split people apart and I am sure that you can think of many more examples.

As I was thinking about this, I had a mental picture of the shop at Letton Hall-we used to go there regularly for church conferences in the 1980 and 90s.



They had wrist bands for sale engraved WWJD. I looked it up to check my memory: Wikipedia says: the phrase "**What would Jesus do?**", often abbreviated to **WWJD**, became popular particularly in the United States in the late 1800s after the widely read book by Charles Sheldon entitled, "In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do." The phrase had a resurgence in the US and elsewhere in the 1990s and as a personal motto for adherents of Christianity who used the phrase as a reminder of their belief in a moral imperative to act in a manner that would demonstrate the love of Jesus through the actions of the adherents."

Maybe we all need to wear one of these bracelets today, to remind us how to act, to remind us to ask God before we say or do something. But also on the positive side, to remind us to support those in need through supporting the foodbank or other charities, to remind us to speak to the lonely person who we really have little in common with, but for whom, such a conversation would be of great importance, to remind us to speak to people in such a way that we see the potential effect of our words on them before we speak, to remind us to speak up for those struggling in life, whether or not those struggles are self-inflicted, to speak up and act against the wrongs in society, to support those trying to make a difference-the list could go on for ever.

We may say "But I can't do that", I don't have the courage to speak out, send a letter of protest etc-but remember those words from Matthew:

*"Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*

God is with us, we know that He is there in all of our lives, we just need to remember and to speak to Him before we act. In a church, we are strengthened because are gathered in God's name, whether in person or online or wherever we are- we know that He is here amongst us.

And remember those words of Paul:

*"Love your neighbour as yourself." <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

If you truly love people, you can do no wrong-can we truly love? Yes, with God's help, I believe we can.