

Sunday 12th February 2023

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, we worship together in God.

Reading Deuteronomy 30:15-20
 Matthew 5: 21-26 & 33-37 ([The Message](#))

Reflection

In our reading from Deuteronomy we find Moses with the people of Israel standing on the cusp of the promised land. Moses has travelled with the people from slavery to wilderness to this point. He has encouraged them, nurtured them and led them through adventures, miracles and mad moments as they have journeyed towards the promised land. Did he always get it right? Probably not. Has he always been a true spokesperson for God? Probably not.

In this reading he reminds the people that they have a choice in how they behave. Choice has not always come naturally to the people. In the early days they were completely lost, their life in slavery had robbed them of the ability to make choices and they had to learn again through the guidance of the Ten Commandments or the ten words of wisdom from community living.

Moses is not going with the people into the promised land and now he must remind them that their future depends on their choices. Read in isolation this passage is affirming – choose life. However when we read on to the next chapter we find a different picture as choosing life for themselves seems to mean denying others life. The others being those who already live in the promised land. Moses advice has gone astray, his experience has tainted his wisdom and his view, and he is not alone in that happening with scriptural stories.

In a story entitled Views from the mountains, author Trevor Dennis explores this through an imagined conversation between Moses and Paul, both of whom have had a chequered history and not always made wise decisions. Both of whom have encountered God 'on a mountain top'.

Moses reflects on his journey with God as he led the people and we see his understanding of God mirroring that naïve simplicity that blames God for the bad things whilst wondering at the cost of freedom. Moses recalls with horror his final instructions to the people of Israel as they cross into the promised land, instructions which he now realises were tainted by his own experiences and witness to the law of retribution and fear. He knows he played a part in the destruction and devastation which followed the entry into Canaan. The guilt has stayed with him.

Paul comforts him and shares his own failings. He has had a similar encounter with God and shared the same guilt remembering his persecution of Christians. However, Paul has moved beyond and been touched by the mercy of God and has found a new Promised Land. He invites Moses to journey with him saying they will lean on one another for that is the secret, and promising Moses that when he tastes this new promised land then he will forgive himself and discover the heights and depths of God's amazing love.

It is a remarkable insight into an aspect of scripture which is often difficult. We read of terrible things done in the name of God and we don't know how to process them.

It all comes back to attitude and how we view God. In our reading from Matthew we are reminded that Jesus encouraged his followers to go deeper with the rules of community living. Don't take them literally and pat yourself on the back because you have not murdered someone, no, our thoughts and attitudes are just as important and destructive as actually committing a crime. Living in love means learning to analyse every aspect of our life and recognise where our attitudes and experience are tainting our wisdom and our ability to love.

Our words and actions are important. In many ways the people of Israel were refugees entering Canaan, just as millions of refugees have travelled towards the developed world viewing it as their own promised land, or even heaven. How we welcome these people will play a part in how they respond to their new circumstances. If we are suspicious and fearful of them then this will lead to fear and conflict in our communities. When we offer a welcome and share in love, then we will find love growing in our communities.

Our words and actions are important. This week we have witnessed a truly devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria. Earthquakes are an essential part of the life of our planet, they are natural occurrences, but in our overpopulated world where capitalism and greed lead to poorly built houses and homes built on land we know cannot be safely used for housing then these natural occurrences become disasters. The way we relate to the planet and use the planet is making these natural occurrences more frequent and often more extreme witnessed in climate change. If the earth is our promised land then how should our actions be viewed?

We have a part to play in the life of our planet for we are a part of creation and our attitude and actions are a reflection of our relation with creation and creation is God. We will give money to emergency appeals such as the appeal for the earthquake but we need to do more we need to encourage the people of earth to choose life and live in community with creation and each other.

God's mercy is without measure and the invitation to choose life is always with us. Every day we too can envision a new promised land and journey together, encouraging each other and nurturing each other to that place where all are welcome, there is room for everyone and everyone is safe. The way of Jesus shows the way, for Jesus invites us to travel beyond what we know, and explore life in all its fullness in the depth of God's hospitality and love.