

Sunday 27th August 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.

Readings Exodus 1:8 - 2:10
Matthew 16:13 - 19

Story Owl babies by Martin Waddell ([listen here](#))

Reflection

In Owl Babies we are reminded that fear can grow and change our behaviour. We read of this in our story from Exodus which reminds us of the power of fear, and it's potential for destruction and terror. It is also a story which reminds us of the power of love and faith filled living.

Around the world we are aware of situations where people have been welcomed into a country for the skills they bring and offer, have made their homes there and brought up families only to find themselves hounded out by those who allow fear to dominate their thoughts and actions.

As we read this story against the backdrop of communities divided through fear and suspicion what do we make of the Pharaoh's actions. We are possibly quick to condemn the course of action and yet are we as quick to condemn what is happening in the world, and in our communities, today? It is food for thought.

However, this story is also about the power of love and seeing potential solutions. The midwives held firm to their faith and together sought to stand against oppression. The sister of Moses, watched and then was quick to see a solution for her mother, a solution which would result in Moses survival and in his position of power that would give him the opportunity to make changes. Even in the midst of fear love is always waiting to be grasped and be allowed to blossom.

Faith does not protect us from the consequences of fear in the world, however, when we live and act in faith, when we choose love we are choosing to take a different outlook and that does make a difference.

There is a wisdom story about an old man, his son and his horse, all he had in the world, and how he lived accepting what came his way without judging it. One day his horse escaped the paddock and galloped off into the distance, the man's neighbours sympathised and said what bad luck, but the old man challenged them, saying who was to judge if it was good or bad luck.

The next day the horse returned and brought with it twelve other wild horses which the man's son was quick to secure in the paddock. The neighbours once again gathered proclaiming this good luck. Again the old man challenged them, asking who knows if it is good luck.

Some days' later the son saddled up one of the new horses and went out riding but the horse was still wild and it bucked throwing off the son and in the fall he broke his leg. The neighbours commiserated over the bad luck which had befallen the son and again the old man replied asking who knew if it was bad luck.

A few weeks later, the militia came to the village and conscripted all the able-bodied young men who were taken off to fight, and for many lose their lives. The old man's son, lying with his broken leg was left. The neighbours commented on the old man's luck but he simply smiled.

Judgement is a by product of fear. When we are tempted to judge our circumstances and those of others we get sidetracked in to the culture of blame. Love is about change, positive change, but that is not without consequences for others and for ourselves.

In our reading from Matthew's gospel we have Jesus asking the disciples 'who do people say I am?' The answer's they give are varied and broad, and may be the results of speculation and gossip. Jesus then asks Peter, 'who do you say I am?' and Peter answers 'the messiah'. This is the first time the term has been used in Jesus' presence although Matthew tells us that John the Baptist used the term of Jesus when he was in prison. Jesus himself comments to Peter that he has heard this from God, it is an inner thought, a sudden awareness of knowledge through the still small voice of the soul.

Peter holds a special place in the gospel stories. He led a faith-filled life but was not immune to making

mistakes, less than wise choices, a bit like us really. How do we listen for God?

The writer Neale Donald Walsch explores how we listen for God and how we can know it is God we hear. He says it is all about the highest choice, the very best option. There is no sense of compromise or second best, no half measures. Love means giving our all.

In our hearts we always know what is the best thing to do but it can cost, it may mean denying ourselves something, putting others first and seeing the bigger picture rather than instant gratification. However we always have a choice, we can hear and know the highest choice but we don't have to make it, that is the nature of unconditional love. Just as any parent can offer advice to a child, it is not always accepted or acted upon.

When we choose not to hear to still small voice we know is God we are still held in God's love but if we are honest with ourselves we know what we have done was not the best we could have done. Here too we have a choice, for we can then wrap ourselves in guilt and remain stuck in the wrong decision or we can accept the mistake and work to remedy it and use the experience to help us make choices in the future. The journey of faith.

Pharaoh must have known in his heart that his actions were driven by fear and not love. We are called to choose love, and every time we do a little of the power of fear is removed. It may not be instantly obvious but loving decisions make a difference in the end. The seeds of love will grow and our example may lead others to question their own decisions. Jesus says to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Our actions do make a difference, they are part of the bigger picture.

It is said that if 11% of people make a change then that change becomes reality. That is not a huge number and many believe that 10% of people are already involved in positive action so we are really talking about another 1% of people and that is doable. Every time we choose to listen to God, to listen to our inner voice encourage the highest choice then we are part of that 11% change, we are part of creating a new reality. We can be the change and make a difference when we seek God's voice, hear it and respond with loving action. What we think and what we share is a part of that change, our actions will influence others and maybe encourage them to become a part of the 11%.

We are on a journey to the kingdom, it will involve change and we are called to avoid making judgements that limit our ability to see the bigger picture and act in love. That is what a faith filled life is all about, doing your best, listening for and to God and making the highest choice.