

Our God is a great big God, and he holds us in his hand

Sunday 29/08/21 Joshua 1:1-9

‘Our God is a great big God and he holds us in his hand’. We sing this at Messy Church but I won’t embarrass us all this morning by singing it with the actions.

Last Sunday we left the Israelites on the bank of the Red Sea. With God’s help they had crossed out of Egypt and were in good heart as they continued to the promised land. But not surprisingly the euphoria didn’t last. For the next generation they made their way across the desert. Moses remained their leader but the Israelites did not always follow. They moaned and rebelled and fought, each other and other tribes, as they went.

When they were hungry, God fed them. Thirsty, God provided water. Unruly, God provided some rules to live by – we know them as the ten commandments. And we read of the beginnings of an organised community. Some of the tribe of Levi were appointed as priests, a tent was set up to shelter the ark containing the tablets on which the commandments were written, worship rituals were laid down. There was a census and complex detailed rules for the conduct of daily life.

Last Sunday Kate told us about Moses. Picked by God to lead his chosen people from slavery to the promised land. During the desert wanderings Moses had several conversations with God, guidance on how to overcome the many difficulties, and instructions on what to do next. But even Moses failed to fully honour God and as a result he was allowed to see but not enter the land that God had

promised. Did God alter his plan or had he always intended that Moses would die on the journey?

Enter Joshua. Just as Moses’ life had been full of unusual and dramatic events Joshua’s was in comparison quiet. He was the apprentice. We first met him as far back as the middle of Exodus where we learn that he was Moses’ assistant ‘since youth’. He seems to have been someone who just got on with things – he led the battle against the Amalekites, went as a spy into Canaan, and accompanied Moses up mount Sinai. It was Joshua that God appointed to succeed Moses with the promise that he would lead the Israelites across the river Jordan. This morning in the gospel reading we heard what God promised to Joshua.

Despite their moaning, and rebelling, despite their leader’s shortcomings, God held the Israelites in his hand and led them into the promised land.

It’s a great story but are any of us thinking of going wandering through a desert in the near future, hoping that God will deliver a picnic just when we need it? I doubt it.

In today’s gospel we hear of the disciples going out two by two as missionaries. ‘Take nothing’ they are told. ‘If no one is interested in your message – leave.’ I have been wondering how the disciples felt about their mission. Most of them were fishermen by trade, not even used to walking great distances as part of their work. Suddenly they are sent to preach, anoint, heal and drive out demons. It was all scarily new and even with the comfort of a companion they must have been nervous about what they had

been asked to do. Perhaps the instruction to move on when no one was interested helped – no need to linger if things weren't going well. They found themselves commissioned to do something for which they had no relevant experience. It was all new and different.

But – mission accomplished – all twelve returned. If there were tales of close scrapes and awkward situations Mark does not feel it necessary to tell us about them.

God held the disciples in his hand and led them through the first mission.

And what of us? Watching or reading the news we cannot fail to realise that the world today is far from a perfect place. We understand that the majority of people just want to get on with their lives, but greed, inequity, a thirst for power all intervene and leave parts of the world with war, civil unrest and a lack of food.

We are the lucky ones. True the Western world has greater prosperity and a greater acceptance of democracy. But I didn't mean that. We are lucky because our faith gives us hope and an understanding that God will be with us whatever happens. There are so many instances of people feeling a presence, an invisible arm around the shoulders, someone sitting beside them, a perception of a voice offering advice. Of knowing that God is with them in a difficult situation.

Moses did not always get things right – he committed murder, he angered God. The disciples often found it hard to believe what Jesus was telling them. But they all had faith and God had plans for them, plans that were fulfilled, even though it was in ways they did

not expect. We don't need to worry that we are not perfect. God has plans for each of us, possibly not the plans that we have for ourselves.

The Israelites were surely not aware when they crossed the Red Sea that a generation would elapse before they reached the new land that God had promised them. God had a plan too big for them to understand. His plans for us are big, unexpected, exciting. How many of us are doing things for Church that we never expected – reading, pastoral calls, children's activities, - and doing them with the support of each other, and dare I suggest actually enjoying doing them.

Like Moses and the disciples God will hold us in his hand. In the hospital, the exam room, at the lectern, in the good moments of life, and the bad. We don't know his plans but like those first disciples setting out on their mission we can step out in faith, encouraged by our fellow Christians, and accomplish things that will surprise us.

The song from Messy Church continues:

How wonderful to be a part of God's amazing plan

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