

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

**Revd Alan F. Miller**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

O give thanks to the Lord! The Lord hears the cries of the people.

**Give thanks to the Lord.**

The works of the Lord are great. Remember what God has done.

**Give thanks to the Lord.**

God has done miracles, and the Lord always remembers God's covenant.

**Give thanks to the Lord. Glory and praise is due to the Lord!**

**HYMN** God we praise you, God we bless you

**PRAYER**

O God who knows our every need before we can even ask,  
you provide all our needs and some of our wants.  
You bless us all.

Make us truly thankful  
and empower us to bless others from the gifts  
you have given us,  
for the glory of your name. **Amen.**

**Psalm 145**

I will extol you, my God and King,  
and bless your name forever and ever.  
Every day I will bless you,  
and praise your name forever and ever.  
Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
his greatness is unsearchable.  
One generation shall laud your works to another,  
and shall declare your mighty acts.  
On the glorious splendour of your majesty,  
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.  
The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,  
and I will declare your greatness.  
They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,  
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.  
The LORD is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Trusting in God's mercy,  
let us confess our sins against God and our neighbours.

**Gracious God,  
we have sought after things, but we have not  
sought after you.  
We have expected generosity, but we have not  
shown generosity.  
We have not been gracious or grateful.  
We have failed to remember all that you have done.  
Forgive us and fill our hearts with gratitude.  
Help us to share our gifts  
and strengthen our legs so that we can  
run after you, O God.  
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

People of God, our sins are forgiven;  
we are reconciled to God.  
Let us therefore love one another  
with gratitude in our hearts and praise on our lips.

### **Exodus 16: 2-15**

<sup>2</sup>The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

<sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

<sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?"

<sup>8</sup>And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but" against the LORD. <sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'"

<sup>10</sup>And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup>"I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

<sup>13</sup>In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

## SERMON

Let the wisdom of your Word  
rain down on us like manna and feed us,  
that we may be strengthened to do the work  
to which we are called,  
for the glory and honour of your name. **Amen.**

Nostalgia - the looking back to a previous time of life, often with a sense of regret, or tinged with sadness, can be a powerful emotion. Many people experience, particularly as we grow older, a sense of longing for a time before our present one, in which we believe ourselves to have been happier, more certain, more confident; sometimes what people long for is a time when they thought things were clearer, the world better, or our situation more secure. The problem often is, that what we remember of the past, and what that past reality was really like, is not always accurate, or a true remembrance – we tend to remember the good things, and to gloss over, if not ignore, the harder times. Everyone knows how easy it can be to re-write our remembered version of history, whether personal, family, or of society and nation. When nostalgia combines with a mis-remembering of the past, it can lead us in the present to make the mistake of thinking, that if only things could always remain the same, many of the problems, challenges, fears and anxieties we face might just disappear, and every aspect of life would be so much easier.

There is certainly something of this sort going on in the hearts and minds of the Israelites, in today's reading from the book of Exodus. The story of the journey of Israel out of Egypt that begins with them passing through the waters of the sea into a new life, and towards a new land, is one that is fraught with danger, obstacles, mis-steps and failure.

Once escaped out of Egypt, saved from slavery, persecution and death, God's people found themselves not in that promised land, but at the beginning of a long and arduous journey through the wilderness, a journey that would take them forty years of wandering in the desert to complete. Yet it was during those forty years that God put Israel to the test, forged a new relationship with them, and prepared them for the future that was to be their destiny, living by a covenant made with them in the commandments and the Law given to Moses. The wilderness experience was the bedrock of Israel's identity as a people saved by God from oppression and death, who in those years of travelling grew to understand more clearly the nature of God as faithful, steadfast, loving and generous.

Yet time and again, during the hardships of that journey, the people of Israel, God's people, rebelled against all that they were experiencing. Put to the test, they turned to worship other Gods; hungry and thirsty, they doubted God's faithfulness; fearful and anxious, they looked back longingly to their lives as slaves in Egypt, they complained about their present suffering, and challenged both God and Moses about their continued suffering and uncertainty. 'If only we could go back to Egypt, back to our old lives, how much better it would be' – 'why have you led us away from our homes in Egypt where we had food to eat, into this barren wilderness where there is nothing for us, and we're going to die from hunger anyway?'. How quickly the people forgot what life in Egypt had really been like, forgot what a great thing God had done, save them from their fate.

God's response to them is not one of anger, as might have been expected, but one that confirms God's nature: in the midst of their despair and when they can see no way forward God will rain bread down upon the hungry people that they might eat their fill in the morning, and provide meat for them in the evening. God will provide, and the people will be satisfied, and live. God does not rescue them from Egypt, only to abandon them to their fate; God remains constant, journeying with them, guiding them

towards their intended future, providing for them and sustaining them on the way; God is always ready for the long-haul, and will remain with them to the end of the road.

Yet, the Manna – literally Ma ‘what’ and Na a question mark – provided like bread from heaven, is enough for the day alone, and no more. The quails they may catch at evening likewise. The people of Israel must learn to trust in the gracious providing of God, who gives them their daily bread, that they may continue their journey, and grow in trust and faith in the one who has made them, chosen them, shaped them, and saves them. They must learn to live with what they need, and not always what they might want. The journey is long, and they need to learn, and to remember, and to give thanks to God.

The misplaced nostalgia for their earlier lives in Egypt, seen through the rose-tinted glasses of mis-remembered experience of the past, could have brought the Israelites to disaster, if they had turned back and returned to Egypt, rejecting the possibilities that God offers for their future.

For ourselves, in this present day, when so much seems so uncertain, when difficulties seem to loom whichever way we look, when we live in a time of growing crisis not only for our own country, but for every country and for all creation as we face the consequences of rapid climate change that threatens our lives and livelihoods, and those of billions of people around the world – often in the poorest nations and regions of the earth – we might be tempted to indulge in our own nostalgia, and look back with longing for times which we think now were easier, safer, more certain. It is a temptation that we should resist.

We are just as likely as the Israelites to mis-remember and re-write our histories, to ignore the bad and to think only of the good times. We might long to be absolved of the responsibility for taking decisions and actions that affect our lives and those of the world in which we live, as if we could return to childhood or youth, when our parents might have taken these decisions for us. If we do, we fall into the same trap the people of Israel found themselves in: unwilling or unable to go forward with God, and longing instead to go back to a past that never really existed. Stuck in the wilderness, we are afraid to move on, and prefer to grumble and complain at our present dire straits, refusing to embrace the necessary change that will enable us to fulfil our calling, as stewards of God’s work of creation, nurturing all people in faith, hope and love.

The good news, for us and for all creation, is that we may yet be able to overcome our fears, our apathy, our lack of confidence, and learn to put our trust once more in God, who is always with us. It is God who holds creation in his hands, and God who leads us towards the life of God’s kingdom, always faithful, always loving, always generous, providing for our daily needs all that we require to live as the people of God. And as the people of God, let us pray for a vision of what God desires of us, of our world, and of our church, as we travel together on the pilgrimage of faith, nurtured by all that God provides.

## **Music for Reflection**

### **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

Let us pray for the needs of the world, saying,  
Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Holy God, who hears our cries and pities our groans,

you are ever faithful.

We come to you with our petitions for ourselves  
and our community. . . .

For our church and its leaders—  
that they be of open mind and open heart . . .  
that they might be the Christian leaders you  
have called them to be . . .  
and that the church be an instrument of love,  
justice, and peace.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For our country and global community—  
that all may be peaceful, fair, and respectful of all peoples  
no matter the religion, colour, gender, or kind of government.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

For our local community—

*[concerns of the community may be named].*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

For those who are overlooked in our society—  
the poor, the young, the old, the bereaved, and the oppressed—  
help us to see them and to be with them.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

For the special intentions that we hold in our hearts.

*[A time of silence is kept.]*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious and loving God,  
we know that you hear us and are always with us,  
and we thank you in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**HYMN** For your generous providing

## **CHARGE**

Rest in the knowledge that God always provides.  
Therefore give and love with a generous heart,  
for this honours God who is most generous and loving.

## **BENEDICTION**

Beloved, may God continue to bless and keep you.  
In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**