

Rhys Frost - 27-09-20 Sermon

I have spent the last long months preparing the school to be as covid safe for the children and teaching staff as we can make it; each classroom has a 2 metre gap between the class and the teacher; there is a kit of anti-bacterial sprays, wipes, and hand sanitizers in every classroom, and office; there are foot operated hand sanitizers dotted throughout the school, and wedges to keep doors open for airflow throughout the school. And, as if we didn't have enough to do, all these need replenishing every now and again, and, places like the Learning Resource Centre, or as us oldies would call it, the library, which is used by different year groups, has to be 'fogged' with a fine spray of anti-bacterial mist, between year groups. And then, of course, I get it in the ear because I never read the 'e' mails I receive; Give me a break! I have to carry a radio at all times, I have to carry my works phone at all times-if I need to be contacted, that is enough, surely?

But, it seems that I am now out of date concerning Safeguarding children, and have to go on-line and complete two courses; I have done one *two and a half hours long*, but luckily, it can be broken down into modules. The second one, which I should have completed on Friday, but couldn't because our computer system was being upgraded, isn't quite so bad, being only an hour and a half long. The thing is, and I know that these courses are important, but I find them quite distressing, so approach them with a certain trepidation and reluctance.

I feel a lot of empathy with Moses; when God first approached him, he wasn't exactly overjoyed or particularly enthusiastic to carry out the task assigned him, in fact his reluctance is what makes the story of Moses so memorable and inspiring for me, God's patience, and willingness to help, shows us that if God has a task for us, we should know that He will provide us with everything we need to complete that task.

Moses has, after a long struggle, managed to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, but is now being harangued by his people because of their need for water; I like their faith; "Oi, Moses! give us water to drink" as though Moses could by himself produce water. Moses points out to them, that their faith is misplaced, and they would do better in trusting in the Lord, but of course human nature being what it is, the people blame Moses, and Moses finds himself in a difficult position, so turns to the Lord and asks "What shall I do with these people? In a moment they will be stoning me" Moses is told by the Lord to go ahead with the elders, taking the rod that he used to strike the Nile, and strike a rock, and the Lord would produce water from that rock. The final verse of our reading is my text for this sermon;

'He named the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites had disputed with him and put the Lord to the test with their question, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?"

The reading from the letter from Paul to the Philippian church, is a set of instructions aimed at making us aware of the differences between Adam and Jesus; The pre-existent Christ was 'in the form of God', Adam, too, was made 'in the image of God' but Adam grasped at what the serpent offered him 'you will be like God knowing good and evil'; Christ had all that already, but laid it aside and emptied Himself; 'He became obedient', unlike the disobedient Adam. And death, which for Adam was a punishment to be endured, Christ embraced. Adam fell through pride,

because he thought he knew better than God. Christ, having accepted humiliation, is now exalted above all things.

Philippians 2:12-13

'So you too, my friends, must be obedient, as always; even more, now that I am absent, than when I was with you. You must work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for His own chosen purpose.'

With everything that has been going on lately, the pandemic, increased vigilance we have to use to protect ourselves, even popping down to the local shop has become an undertaking-making sure we take a face mask and use it, even though others don't; trying to gauge a time when few people are likely to be in the shop; trying to keep a safe distance from those who have entered the shop after us. The increased workload because of the pandemic, or the enforced idleness of those furloughed because of it; the worry whether we will have a job or not when this is all over, and how different life will be. I feel that I, for one, have become lackadaisical in my discipline regarding physically going to church-when we were unable to attend church how many of us missed the on-line services provided for us, or not bothered to watch it until the continuously repeated programmes on our T.V.s have driven us to watch the service?

We have fallen into bad habits, our discipline has become sadly lacking, and because we have allowed ourselves to become sloppy, we have forgotten our principal function, that is, through our own free-will to worship our God. And if we have forgotten that, we will also have forgotten to converse with God. And if we don't talk to God, how can we know what God wants of us? We know God, each of us, and if we took the time we could come up with several reasons why we should worship Him; the many, many blessings He has given us; the opportunities He has given us; the gifts He endows us with. But we, like Adam, have fallen short of the mark;

'He named the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites had disputed with him and put the Lord to the test with their question, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?"

This is basically what we are doing-yes, with the very real threat of another lockdown, albeit a very short term one this time, no sign of a vaccine to combat the Covid virus, and the ever increasing rise in the number of new cases, perhaps we can understand the reason behind people wondering where God is in this world of ours; Logically, it does seem plausible that God has taken this opportunity to take a holiday, feels that mankind chooses not to believe in Him, and has left us to our fate; but we should remind ourselves of what Saint Paul wrote;

Philippians 2:12-13

'So you too, my friends, must be obedient, as always; even more, now that I am absent, than when I was with you. You must work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed, for His own chosen purpose.'

Read it as “So you too, my friends, must be obedient, as always; even more, now that you consider me absent”

We must not allow ourselves to fall into complacency, thinking to ourselves that because we weren't able to attend church, that we don't need to go, telling ourselves that we'll simply catch up on the service when or if we can. But neither must we allow ourselves to become despondent, thinking that God has forsaken us, because God is with us now more than ever; if we look for God in this time of crisis, then we will find Him just as ready to grant us peace, fortitude, strength to continue, and comfort. We need to talk to God, tell Him our fears, our hopes, and ask Him for an increase in faith which will allow us to be the Christians He wants us to be, to allow ourselves to be instrumental in helping, not only ourselves, but those around us through this pandemic.

As I said at the start, most of my working day is spent replenishing cleansing stations, and anti-bacterial fogging; we haven't done any routine maintenance for the last six months or so. But I am privileged to work in a school, so, yes, I can play my role in prevention; but, everyone can play a part, however passive it might seem; simply saying a cheery “good morning” to your neighbours, if you are going shopping, how about enquiring if they need anything? Take the dog for a walk and instead of robotically sinking into your favourite reverie, prayer walk the streets- just pray for the people living in that street and ask for God's care upon it. We can't all be front-line troops, but where would an army be without the support troops, those that bring the supplies to the men?

We can all play a role in this pandemic, all do something positive to help; but we must be obedient, we must take the time to seek out God's will for us, and obey it; Adam fell through pride, we must not copy Him, but copy Jesus, God's Son, because only through Him can we have the hope of eternal life, a death that we can embrace, not have to endure, like Adam.
Amen.