

Saved for something more

For those of us who grew up in or near the church, went through Sunday School or attended Scripture at school there are a range of stories of people in the Bible who were talked about. We have looked at a few of them over the last few weeks, with Abraham and Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac and continuing down to Joseph. We finished last week looking at the reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers and if we have spent some time thinking back to the past, or if we have recently read the book of Genesis in the Old Testament we might remember how long after Joseph a new Pharaoh arrived on the scene in Egypt and was afraid.

He was afraid because the descendants of Jacob and his 12 sons filled the land with lots of Israelites and the Pharaoh was worried that they might take over Egypt so he plotted to kill the sons of the people of Israel.

Now there are 2 women in this story way back then that were very wise. They were midwives and they helped deliver the babies of the people in a way which kept the families growing, and God blessed Shiphrah (beautiful) and Puah (young girl) the two midwives. Through them the children were safe. And there is the familiar story of Moses being born and hidden in a basket and placed in the reeds at the side of the river. From there he was taken to the Pharaoh's palace where he grew up and helped eventually lead the people of Egypt out of slavery.

It wouldn't have come about though except for those two midwives. And if we think about many stories we have heard over the years, it is often people who don't really seem to be very important that do there bit and great things can come out of it.



Today we have heard a reading from the book of Romans and in it we are urged to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

Now this is not talking about a physical sacrifice being thrown onto an altar but rather reminding us that everything we do is important. The reading really calls for us to think about how much we are committed to God, and Paul, the writer of Romans, says that it really needs to be the whole of who we are.

He then goes on to remind us of how important it is to be a part of a community- to be and work together as one even though we have different gifts. I've been spending a lot of time thinking about hospitality and how easy it is for us to be afraid of difference. When we do, we become like the Pharaoh in the time of Moses- so afraid that we can do awful things.

Yet when we embrace difference and look to learn from each other, we begin to experience a unity which is beyond things that come from the world.

Paul gets this, and encourages us to not conform to the world but to be transformed- through the presence of God's Spirit we can be continually grow in our relationship with God, and be deepening our discipleship as we follow in the way of God. It can be done on our own but it is so much better and richer when we are with other people working together with our different gifts and skills so that we might grow together.

Jesus gets this as well. In the reading from the gospel of Matthew Jesus asks Peter who does Peter say Jesus is. With a revelation that can only come from God, Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah, Son of the Living God.

There are many times when we can think about how we might answer this very question. Who do we say Jesus is?

Is he our saviour, our brother or our friend? Is he someone who was a good teacher or a leader and even a prophet? Or is he all of these and more?

This conversation between Jesus, Peter and the disciples takes place in a part of the country which was far from Jerusalem, Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee. Last week we heard how Jesus had been in the area of Tyre and Sidon, and now he has travelled to the area of Caesarea Philippi. You can see this in the map.

So when Jesus got there he began to talk about what had been happening in his ministry and this particular reading tells us that Peter was to be the rock on which Jesus would build his church.

We don't know whether Jesus meant to build his church or whether the early church took this passage as a good opportunity to establish itself, but Jesus could see that Peter, the one who could walk on water, then sank when he doubted, the one who could identify Jesus as the Messiah, then could deny him around the time of Jesus death- this very Peter was to be the one on whom God built the church.

In a way, there is little wonder that we get caught up in the ways of the world and fight and disagree on our differences instead of focussing on the things which hold us together.

And this reading is important for another reason. Now that Jesus has been identified by the disciples as the Messiah, he can now set his sights on Jerusalem. Even though he tells his disciples not to tell anyone else, they clearly did but perhaps that only came about after the events that happened in Jerusalem.

Span a couple of thousand years later and here we are scattered and gathered as the community of God. For some of us, we are feeling very uncertain and unsure about what the future holds. And that is our human response. Yet we are reminded that there is someone who draws us together who is the Messiah- the One whom God has sent to save us. We know that God has not abandoned us- even though we may feel like that a little bit.

We, like Moses, may feel a little like a basket case- powerless to the changes and events that are happening around yet we also have the opportunity because we know the One who rescues us.

We have been saved through Jesus Christ- not just for ourselves but for all who we meet. Together, we are strong. Even when we are apart, we are far stronger than we realise. And God calls us to be more than someone who has been saved.

My prayer for you this week is that you might truly be alive for God- and be reassured of God's love and care and rescue even in this, the strangest of times.



<https://www.bible-history.com/biblestudy/caesarea-philippi.html>
