

Salford Methodist Circuit



Is God Among Us Or Not - 27th September 2020

Rev Kim Ratcliffe

Good morning and welcome to worship.

Reading: Psalm 78 : 1 - 4 & 12 - 16

*Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
things that we have heard and known,
that our ancestors have told us.
We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done*

*In the sight of their ancestors he worked marvels
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.
He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
and made the waters stand like a heap.
In the daytime he led them with a cloud,
and all night long with a fiery light.
He split rocks open in the wilderness,
and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.
He made streams come out of the rock,
and caused waters to flow down like rivers.
Amen*

If we think date wise we have no date of when creation happened, we have no date for when Noah built the ark. Paper and pen, well papyrus and ink, we think, was around 2500BC and libraries wouldn't have been filled with the billions of books that now fill the world's libraries. I can become quite nostalgic when I pick up an old book - I love old books, one that you know there have been many people who have delved into the words written on each page. The smell is something else that I love and the colours of the pages too. I like to look at the inside of the cover and see if there is any evidence of who the book belonged to, the date in which it was written; even if I don't actually buy the book and bring it home I can somehow engage with the book if only for a moment thinking about the writing of it, the script being handed over to someone or sent to the person who gives it the go ahead to be printed in the end. The book starts off with an idea or a piece of information that the writer wants to develop and share with anyone who may have an interest in it or want to hear what the writer has to say.

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Moses was ascribed to have been the author of the first five books of the Bible. The Pentateuch. It is thought to have been written approximately between 1406/7 and 1450 BC, the final part of Deuteronomy which covers the death of Moses was thought to be written by Joshua.

We are now in 2020 so I make it that we are reading our Old Testament passage that we will hear in a moment approximately 3,020 years after Moses probably wrote it. At the very beginning of creation people wanted to do their own thing, go their own way. God's instructions have been disobeyed since time began by humankind who thrive to be in charge, have complete control of what they do with disregard to what even God wanted and knew would be best for them. We have struggled with authority since day one but we need to remember that God is with us today as He was with Moses He really is! We will, first of all, hear the first piece of scripture now; it is taken from the Book of Exodus Chapter 17 verses 1 to 7, and as I said it is taken from the NRSV version of the Bible. Then we will join Clare and our singers as we sing 'Moses I know you're the man'.

Reading : Exodus 17 : 1 - 7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

"Is the Lord among us or not?"

Hymn: Moses I Know You're The Man

*'Moses, I know you're the man,'
the Lord said.
'You're going to work out my plan,'
the Lord said.
'Lead all the Israelites out of slavery,
and I shall make them a wandering race
called the People of God.'*

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*So every day,
we're on our way,
for we're a travelling, wandering race,
we're the People of God.*

*'Don't get too set in your ways,'
the Lord said.
'Each step is only a phase,'
the Lord said.
'I'll go before you and I shall be a sign
to guide my travelling, wandering race;
you're the People of God.'
So every day...*

*'No matter what you may do,'
the Lord said.
'I shall be faithful and true,'
the Lord said.
'My love will strengthen you as you go along,
for you're my travelling, wandering race,
you're the People of God.'
So every day...*

*'Look at the birds in the air,'
the Lord said.
They fly unhampered by care,'
the Lord said.
'You will move easier if you're travelling light,
for you're a wandering, vagabond race,
you're the People of God.'
So every day...*

*'Foxes have places to go,'
the Lord said.
'But I've no home here below,'
the Lord said.
'So if you want to be with me all your days,
keep up the moving and travelling on,
you're the People of God.'
So every day...*

Thank you Clare and our singers. Shall we come before God in prayer? Thank you. Let us pray:

We praise you, God our Lord,
For the world which you created
And for our place in it.



You have given us life that we may love and serve you;
And though we have resisted your purpose and misused your gift,
You have not left us in our sin,
But have sent your Son Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.

We thank you that for us he became human,
Died on the cross,
Rose from the dead,
And ascended into heaven;
There he reigns in glory,
And there he prays for us;
And we believe that he will be our judge.

We thank you that you have sent your Holy Spirit
To bring us to a new life in Christ
And give us freedom to call you Lord.

We bring before you now our personal prayers of thanksgiving

[Silence]

Therefore, with all the Church on earth and in heaven,
We give you our thanks and praise.
We dedicate ourselves to you;
Strengthen us by your Holy Spirit to do your will,
And bring us with all of humankind to your kingdom,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

We say the Lord's Prayer together:

*Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed be your name
Thy kingdom come
Thy will be done on earth
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and
Forgive us our trespasses as we
Forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power
And the glory, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Reading: Matthew 21 : 23 - 31a.



The Authority of Jesus Questioned

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you; the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Thanks be to God for that word.

Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of mankind

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.*

*O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!*

*With that deep hush subduing all
our words and works that drown
the tender whisper of thy call,*

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*as noiseless let thy blessing fall
as fell thy manna down.*

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.*

*Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!*

Is the Lord among us or not?

We are used to listening to and even, obeying or not obeying the words of those in authority. But what is authority nowadays? Do we listen to people who stand on the street corners, people stood at the front of large audiences, do we listen to the people leading business meetings, church meetings, speaking from the pulpit or the lectern, talking to us and with us and sharing with us what perhaps we should or shouldn't be doing or just simply sharing information with us? Maybe not shouting out about it but speaking, talking to us. Do we listen, or do we laugh and huff and puff and walk on and do our own thing? Do we listen to those who have been invited to take on leadership roles in businesses, in politics, communities and even our churches? What and who do we listen to today? I can understand why there is a resistance to taking on leadership roles, even in a church situation. People like in Moses' times don't hold back sometimes from what they have on their minds and it comes out through their mouths, and sadly this can be the same in any environment. Times have changed over centuries but there is still the need for us to abide by rules that have been made, rules that often come from people in leadership and because of that they are given the responsibility to pass the information on. Today, like in Moses' time we are still being told and guided how we should be working and even behaving through guidelines that are given to us. When things don't go quite to plan, then who is to blame then? Is it the powers that be or is it the middle management or is it people who are trying to implement the guidance from the top? Today we do live in a culture of blame and sometimes we don't even know that we are being blamed for something until we are faced with what seems to someone with a huge problem; but then when we are talking through that situation, the realisation is that things can be resolved with a little bit of patience and understanding.

Imagine being in the wilderness of the situation that not only the Israelites were being led through but the wilderness that Moses was leading them through with minimum tools to hand apart from the knowledge that God was with him. This

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wasn't the first time that Moses had faced the unrest of God's people. The people thought that Moses had "taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done bringing us out of Egypt? In Exodus chapter 14 verse 11, this is a few verses before that which I've read. "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land". Then again further down the line there was another state of uncertainty and the need to challenge Moses once more. But that was ages ago. wasn't it? We don't have anything like that here today!

I'm going to turn from Moses for a wee while and look to Jesus in Matthew, it's always good to look to Jesus, whether in Matthew or any of the books of the Bible. Now Jesus - Jesus I see as my friend. I can talk with Jesus. Jesus in our Matthew reading went to church, well the Temple, a place where he used to being challenged by the teachers, remember Jesus as a 12-year-old boy in the Temple? Just as the chief priests and the elders challenged Jesus, he certainly was unafraid to challenge them too. So, as they asked him "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" He was able to pose just one question to them. "Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" When you think about this, Jesus was in their temple, the temple that was theirs -well God's they had claimed it though - and it was the temple that they had authority in. Who did this man think that he was, cheek of him! Teaching the people the chief priests should have been? They should be listening to them, not someone who hasn't officially been given their authority. Or had he? He had of course, at his Baptism in Matthew Chapter 3 we see Jesus, he was anointed by God with God's Spirit and "a voice from heaven said. "This is my Son." People, including the tax collectors and prostitutes, will have seen this happen, at that moment of Jesus' Baptism from John, it was affirmed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. If the Chief Priests and Elders said that they believed they would have had to follow Jesus the Messiah but they wouldn't back down, they were stubborn and enjoyed the position that they held. It takes a lot to admit that you were wrong, doesn't it? If only they had the mind to sit down calmly with Jesus and to discuss with Jesus, maybe as individuals they may have come to see the light but they didn't and that's sad. The two sons in Matthew were asked to go and do a task for their Father. One went straight ahead, jumped up, agreed to do the job and then failed to fulfil his promise. The other son was reluctant to do the work of his father but after a while he realised his mistake and just got on with the job. Moses was given a task to do for God. If we don't react to something that God has asked of us, then we are in danger of not doing anything at all. We need to be consistent in how we respond to God and that does mean trusting that God is with us, not only with us as individuals but among us. US - you and me - as we go about our everyday lives as they are today. We have got such a lot to look forward to in the months ahead. I can understand with all of the uncertainty we have been going through for a long time now that we have become a little bit disheartened and a wee bit confused or a lot confused about what we are and what we aren't able to do. And I said recently "can someone please let me know what the recent



guidelines are" not because I don't check, I do, but it can change from day to day and week to week and I like to get things right.

We may feel that we have been doing all the right things, facing the challenges that we have had to endure. The first verse of Exodus today we heard, "From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded." Moses was their leader and they looked to Moses to blame for the hardships that they faced on their journey. It brought their leader to the point that he cried out to God himself because he had run out of things to say to them. God heard the anguish that Moses was in. He hears our anguish, and we need to believe that. I need to believe that. The Lord answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock of Horeb. Strike the rock, the water will come out of it for the people to drink." Are you in a place that you feel you want to argue with God and that you are testing God? "Is the Lord among us or not?" are you saying? We need to continue to support one another during the different stages that this difficult journey has been taking us on. We have walked difficult paths in the past and we will continue to walk with God before us until we come to a point where the best thing in our lives is KNOWING that the best of all God is indeed with us, God IS with us. Thank you, God, for being with us here today and remaining with us always. Amen and thanks be to God.

Amen

Hymn: Best of all God is with us.

*Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are
God remains though faith is frail.*

*Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.*

*Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.*

*Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, and death is gain.'*

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*Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.*

Let's come before God with our Prayers of Intercession. Let us pray:

Let us pray for the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and understanding
May grow among all nations and the people of the world.

We pray for the governments, that there may be peace and justice among
humankind.

We pray for all people in their daily life and work, that they may have joy in
doing God's will.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Let us pray for all who minister to the suffering, the friendless and the needy,
that God's purposes may be fulfilled,

For our enemies and all who wrong us,

that we may bear a Christian witness,

For the suffering, the sorrowful, people of all ages and those who are

Coming to the end of their lives.

May they be strengthened and comforted.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We keep a moment's silence for any special prayers needed at this point.

[Silence]

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Let us pray for the whole Church of Christ, that professing one Lord,
One faith and one baptism, all whom Christ calls may live in the unity of the one
Spirit,

For all who spread the gospel, that they may draw all humankind to our Lord,

For all who receive God's word, that they may reveal his glory.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

We give thanks and praise for all your saints.

Help us, strengthened by their fellowship, to follow their examples,

And bring us with them into the fullness of your eternal joy.

Lord God, present with us now, you are holy and faithful,

You have called us to your service; help us to know and to

Do your will, that we may be worthy of our calling;

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Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn: 'Great is thy faithfulness'

*Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:*

*Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

*Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:
Great is thy faithfulness...*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
Great is thy faithfulness...*

The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Remain with you always. Amen.

Go in peace in the power of the Spirit
To live and work to God's praise and God's glory.
Thanks be to God.
Amen

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Moses, I Know You're The Man - Estelle White

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