

Saturday 30 March 2019

Scripture: Hosea 5: 15-6:6; Psalm 50(51); Luke 18: 9-14

*'Come, let us return to the Lord;
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
he will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.'*

These are the words of hope for people who feel far from God – sometimes because of sin and sometimes simply because of life circumstances. The temptation can be to think there is no longer any point in trying – that we have failed so badly that we cannot make amends – that God has finally had enough and given up on us. This passage gives us hope and the inspiration to persevere – to press on until we are ready to appreciate again God's graciousness to us.

- When have you felt struck down or downcast?
- What gave you hope and the ability to press on regardless?

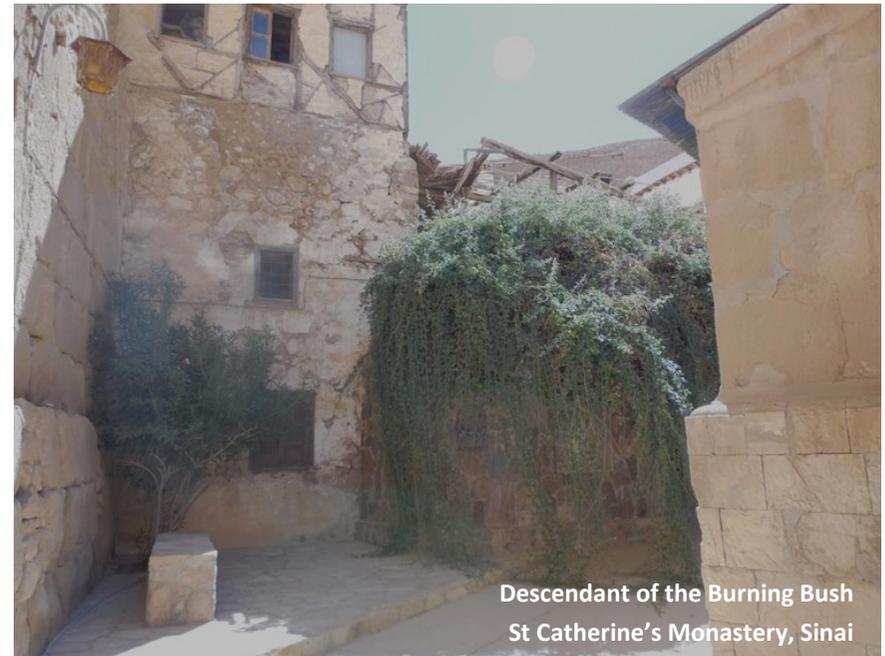
If you are facing a time when you feel downcast or your faith feels dry, read this passage a few times and try to see which words or phrases speak to you and give you hope.



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**
DEPARTMENT FOR SPIRITUALITY

GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE AND MERCY:

Attraction and Call



Descendant of the Burning Bush
St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai

3rd Sunday of Lent Sunday 24 March 2019

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Scripture: Exodus 3: 1-8, 13-15; Psalm 102(103); 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13; 1-9

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!'

This is one of the most famous incidents in our scriptures – Moses and the Burning Bush. What we sometimes overlook is that Moses has a moment of choice – he could have decided that sorting out the sheep was more important and moved on but, instead, he makes the decision to turn aside and “look at this great sight”. It is when the Lord sees this that he calls out Moses from the bush – as if he was waiting for the response before he was sure that Moses was the one for the task. Of course, God knew Moses and what he was capable of. In fact, he knew better than Moses himself. But Moses – like so many people in the Old and New Testaments and in the whole history of faith – had a choice and could have carried on his own sweet way and not allowed God to change the world through him.

- What made Moses turn aside to look at the bush and want to learn more?
- When have you had a similar experience? (Even if you have not gone on to change the world!)

Spend time with the Reading. Read it through slowly – pausing to “check in” with what is happening – how Moses might be feeling – how it seems to speak to you of encountering God in a very different world from Moses’ but one in which God is every bit as present as he was in the Bush.

Friday 29 March 2019

Scripture: Hosea: 14-2-10; Psalm 80(81); Mark 12: 28-34

*God said,
'I will heal their disloyalty;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.*

...

They shall again live beneath my shadow,
they shall flourish as a garden;
they shall blossom like the vine,
their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.'*

* Remember this is written for a hot, dry country where shadow is good thing!

This is another beautiful and reassuring passage – and worth reading the whole of it if you can. So often, the Jewish people gave way to the feeling that God was harsh and judgemental and condemned them out of hand. It is a temptation to us too – especially when things are hard and we feel that God is sending them as punishment. God does expect good things from us but does not want us so weighed down by guilt that we become like dead wood – hard and brittle and incapable of sprouting new life. In this extract, we see what God hopes his forgiveness will lead to – to flourishing and blossoming and offering a spiritual fragrance that spreads out into a broken and damaged world.

- Have you experience forgiveness like this – that brought you peace and hope and renewed joy in living?
- Who do you know who needs to know this forgiveness?

Reflect on God’s words as passed on through Micah. Take them slowly – and “hear” them as directed to you personally. Rest in that sense of God’s love and mercy for you.

Thursday 28 March 2019

Scripture: Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalm 94(95); Luke 11:14-23

God said to Jeremiah

'From the day your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until today, day after day, I have persistently sent you all my servants the prophets. But they have not listened to me, have not paid attention; they have grown stubborn and behaved worse than their ancestors. You may say all these words to them: they will not listen to you; you may call them: they will not answer.'

We sometimes think of prophets as messengers of doom but this passage seems to be more a case of passing on God's total hacked-offness. It is, admittedly, hundreds of years since God led the people out of Egypt and planted them in the Promised Land. It is a long time since he passed on the teaching about how they should live: they have chosen to forget. God has sent prophet after prophet to remind them: they have chosen to ignore them. God knows that the people will probably also ignore Jeremiah: he sends him anyway.

- What does this passage tell you about God and perseverance?
- What else could God have done to get the message across?

Spend some time today thinking about your own attitude to God's teaching – through his Word and through the Church. Ponder how well you listen and how much notice you take. Bring your thoughts into a time of prayer and see what emerges.

Monday 25 March 2019 – The Annunciation

Scripture: Isaiah 7: 10-14, 8: 10; Psalm 39(40); Hebrews 10: 4-10; Luke 1: 26-38

Ahaz said, I will not ask for a sign, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.'

At first glance, we might admire Ahaz – so noble and respectful that he does not want to test God. In fact, Ahaz was not a man of faith – being tempted by the faiths of other countries and coveting their power. Isaiah loses patience – knowing that God is greater than the gods of the other nations and that God has not forsaken the People. It is interesting that the sign Isaiah identifies is not one that we would associate with great power. It is, in fact, an everyday miracle – one that a mighty king would barely notice. A young woman becoming pregnant and the child she bears being God with his people... the child who will grow up to change the world forever.

- Do you think it is right to “test God” or holier not to?
- Why do so many people not see the miracle of pregnancy and the sign it brings of God's ongoing love for humanity?

Spend some time today praying for women who are pregnant – their babies a sign of God's continuing to bring new life to the world.

Tuesday 26 March 2019

Scripture: Daniel 3: 25, 34-43; Psalm 24(25); Matthew 18: 21-35

Azariah stood still in the fire and prayed aloud:

And now with all our heart we follow you;

we fear you and seek your presence.

Do not put us to shame,

but deal with us in your patience

and in your abundant mercy.

Deliver us in accordance with your marvellous works,

and bring glory to your name, O Lord.

Azariah – also known as Abednego – finds himself in the fire having been thrown into the furnace with Shadrach and Meshach after they refuse to bow down before an image of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Although they were Jewish in a pagan state, they had risen to high office and it may have been the king's sense of betrayal that led him to act in such a vicious way. It should have been a horrific death – but the young men were kept safe and those looking into the furnace claimed that there were four people in there – the fourth being like an angel. Even with such protection, it is astonishing that Azariah was able to pray with such confidence and trust in the midst of the fiery furnace.

- Where does the faith come from to disobey the rules that fly in the face of God's laws?
- What impression do you think the way these young men face such horror had on those who witnessed it?

If time permits, read the rest of the story – and see what happened to Nebuchadnezzar and the boys next! You can find the whole thing (leading up to the fire and afterwards) [here](#).

Wednesday 27 March 2019

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9; Psalm 147; Matthew 5: 17-19

Moses said to the people: 'See, as the Lord my God has commanded me, I teach you the laws and customs that you are observe in the land you are to enter and make your own. Keep them, observe them and they will demonstrate to the peoples your wisdom and understanding.'

It is easy to think of the Ten Commandments – and others that God passed on to the Israelites – as laws just to be obeyed and woe betide you if you did not! There is a place for a simple obedience but the power of following God's commandments goes far beyond that. Imagine living in a society where people were treated according to what we learn in the commandments – where there was no theft or violence – where there was mutual respect and no jealousy ... not because people did not sometimes feel envy or anger but because they chose not to act on the negative feelings. Imagine how people living in a society where others were all too willing to act on such feelings might see the wisdom behind a way of life lived in God's way.

- What would our society look like if everyone lived by God's commands?
- Why do people resist living in accordance with the way of life God offers?

Pray today about the way of life God offers and how far you are able to live up to it. How do your choices to act or not act on your negative feelings make a difference to how you live with others? Be honest with yourself – and with the Lord – and see where your reflections take you... and see whether any changes are necessary.