

COLLECT FOR EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

God, our judge and Saviour,
Teach us to be open to your truth and to trust in your love,
that we may live each day with confidence in the salvation
which is given through Jesus Christ our Lord.

LECTIONS ON A LECTIONARY READING for 11th October 2020:

by Rev Peter Wainwright - **EXODUS 32 v 1 - 14**

How could they forget so quickly! How could they turn their backs on the God who had recently miraculously delivered them from slavery? It was only a short time ago that the Israelites had been on the safe side of the Red Sea, having seen the elite army of their former Egyptian slave drivers all drowned. And at that moment, knowing that they were now free, they had no doubt in their minds as to why it had happened. It had happened because the God whom Moses had reminded them about had intervened. And they were thanking and praising that God, the one whose name is 'I, I am' - sort of 'Yahweh') or in English translations 'The Lord'. So, Exodus 15 begins with: *Moses and the Israelites sang this song to **the Lord**:*

*'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.*

*² The Lord is my strength and my might,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.*

*¹¹ 'Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendour, doing wonders?*

And yet, for many that act of worship appears to have been only skin-deep; at the first moment of crisis they reverted back to preferring to really put their trust and faith in an Egyptian god. This Egyptian god had several advantages from their point of view. Firstly it had a visible form, something tangible -a golden calf. So much easier to worship something you could touch and see and which you helped make. You felt more in control -you could make it in your own image, make it to be compliant with your wishes. Secondly, it has a sexual element -it justified indulging in sexual acts, because the purpose of the worship was to celebrate fertility. The God Moses talked about, in contrast, was invisible and called for moral purity; and to worship him depended on trusting that He can and will fulfil his promises - the promises He had made to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In fairness to the Israelites they had had to wait a very long time for Yahweh to act. Exodus 12 v 40 tells us that the Israelites had lived in the Rameses and Succoth districts of Egypt for 430 years, from the time Joseph invited his family to stay (and so survive a famine) until the time they escaped led by Moses. They had chosen to stay rather than return to the land God had selected for them, possibly because initially life was easier and much more comfortable

in Egypt. We get the impression that it was only towards the end of the 430 years that their conditions became unbearable, as a new dynasty of Pharaohs became concerned about how numerous they were becoming and saw them as a threat - hence the drive to reduce their numbers by killing baby boys and upping the intensity of the slavery.

Perhaps around the time of Moses (whose life had been amazingly spared as his Mother put him in a basket and floated it down the River Nile) some of the Hebrew elders began to recall the stories of a God who had appeared to Abraham, and began to cry out to Him for deliverance. Meanwhile, Moses, now a shepherd in the wilderness, had had a visit from that same God by a burning bush. That God told Moses to go back to Egypt to rescue the Lord's people. Moses was doubtful whether the Israelites would remember that God or believe what Moses had to say. In Exodus 3 v 13 we read that: *Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' ¹⁴God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you." ' ¹⁵God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you": This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.*

¹⁶*Go and assemble the elders of Israel.*

. And God also spoke to Aaron in Egypt and told him to go and meet Moses coming the other way and accompany him back. So, we read in Exodus 4 v 27 - 31 that: *The Lord said to Aaron, 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.' So he went; and he met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. ²⁹Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. ³⁰Aaron spoke all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and performed the miraculous signs in the sight of the people. ³¹The people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped.*

So, Aaron had no excuse when he allowed the Israelites to make and worship a golden calf in the wilderness, while Moses was away (seeking the Lord for commandments as to how God wanted his people to live). Aaron had seen the true God at work. But, Aaron got scared - fear gripped him - fear that he would lose control of the people if he didn't give them what they were asking for. The church has a similar role in the world today - to make known God's provision for salvation from His wrath in Jesus. How important it is for Christians today to remain faithful to the promises they have made to God!

Today happens to be my 75th birthday, and as I reach three quarters of a century perhaps you would permit me a few brief reflections on my life so far, as I conclude this sermon? I have been attending church services weekly since 1945 (the only break in that pattern being this year during Covid lockdown when I have worshipped via Zoom etc.). In 1953 I asked Jesus to forgive me my sins, to come into my life, and I told him I trusted in Him. In 1962 I asked God to fill me with the Holy Spirit. In 1971 I was baptised in a church in London. In 1972 I was Confirmed at Kings College Chapel London. In 1975 I was ordained at Guildford Cathedral. But none of that is of any eternal worth unless I stay faithful to the end - unless I

keep to the promises I made to God and His people. May the Lord keep me in faith, and may I not let my heart grow so cold that I have, in effect, gone back on my confession in Christ. There is a danger that, due to Covid 19 and the resultant breaking of habitual patterns of worship, bible reading and prayer that any of us could grow cold towards God. As Jesus told us in Matthew 24 v 12 *"because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold; but he who stands firm to the end will be saved"*. How wonderful that God in His mercy has given us a way through to eternal life by His son, Jesus - provided we stand firm on the promises we have made to Him.

John Bode, who lived from 1816 to 1874, says it better than I, in this hymn:

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

Oh, let me feel Thee near me;
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

AMEN