

Trinity 16 2020 – 27<sup>th</sup> September

27 <sup>th</sup> September Trinity 16	9. 30 & 11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 17 vv 1-7 p75 Philippians 2 vv 1-13 p1179 Matthew 21 vv 23-32 p989	EH <b>362</b> Glorious Things <b>341</b> Blest Are the Pure <b>58</b> (tune 12) The Sinless One <b>463</b> (Newington) Thine Forever <b>294</b> Just as I am <b>235</b> Forth In Thy Name
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**O**LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*For it is God which worketh in you both to will and do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2<sup>13</sup>)*

The Children of Israel were journeying through the desert. There were thousands of them – not just fit young men, pioneers, soldiers in the army of the LORD of hosts – but women and children and old men and babes in arms as well. They had vast flocks and herds. The absence of water was a very serious matter indeed. First, they would have to kill the animals or allow them to die. Then the more vulnerable – the babies, the old people, the sick – would perish of thirst. Lastly, if they couldn't find water at all, the young, healthy, fit adults too would die in the desert. The Twelve Tribes of Israel might have been forgotten by history, just a pile of bones perhaps to be discovered in the Sinai desert by some future archaeologist, after thousands of years.

So, it is not surprising that they were angry with Moses for leading them out of the land of Egypt, where there were food and water, out into the wilderness where there was none. Yes, they had prayed to be freed from slavery, but, no, they did not want to die of thirst in the desert. What kind of a leader was this Moses? Apparently, he hadn't thought things through and drawn up proper plans. Better to have stayed in Egypt if there was no believable strategy for getting thousands of people plus their flocks and herds across the desert and into the Promised Land.

So Moses, beleaguered leader of the Israelites, prayed to God. That is always the best thing to do. We can always talk to God and we ought always to talk to God – in the good times and in the bad times. *In all time of our tribulation; in all time of our wealth; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, Good Lord, deliver us.*

Why shouldn't the Israelites have been scared and angry with Moses? They shouldn't have been afraid because, in departing from Egypt and heading out into the desert, they were doing what God told them to do. If we follow in the steps of Jesus and try to lead our lives the way God wants us to lead our lives, we have nothing to be afraid of. We can trust God to look after us. We can trust God to supply our needs. We can have faith that God will make available to us the resources we need to do His work. That's why I don't fear for the Church. God supplies everything we need to accomplish His purposes. If we run out of resources as a church, it is for one of two reasons. Either what we are attempting to do (or to keep doing) is not in accordance with God's Will for us or we are failing to trust and obey. I once heard a story about the leader of a Church standing up in the pulpit at the beginning of a big project and saying, *I've got some good news and some bad news for you from God. The good news is that He has provided all the money we need to complete this good work. The*

*bad news is that it is still in your bank accounts.* Trust and obey. God will supply our needs and that is as true in our personal lives as it is for Churches. It would be true for communities and nations, the world itself even, if only people would trust in God and obey His Will. There is no shortage of what we need. God gives in abundance. It's our failure to use His gifts faithfully in accordance with His Will which leads to our problems.

So the Israelites should not have doubted that God would look after them because they were obeying His Will in departing from Egypt. There is another reason too why they should have trusted God. They had seen His mighty works. They had observed the ten plagues God sent on the Egyptians. They had been kept safe on Passover Night when the angel of death took the Egyptian firstborn. God had parted the Red Sea to enable them to escape Pharaoh's pursuing army and they had seen the Egyptians drown when they tried to follow and compel the Israelites to return to slavery. God had led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And, when they had complained that there was nothing to eat in the desert, God had given them the manna.

So, not only should they have trusted God because they were following His call, but also because they had seen so much evidence of His power and His care for them. They should have drawn on their experiences of what God can and will do for His people.

S Paul says that all these things which happened at the time of the Exodus are our examples. We are going through a tough time now. We may be fearful or at least anxious. Some people seem to be quite angry, if not at the disease, then at the restrictions imposed because of it, or at other people's failure to obey the rules, or as a result of their suspicions about the possible origins of the virus. There seems to be a growing lack of trust in our leaders as they struggle to contain the disease without destroying our economy and putting an end to our normal social interactions. Whatever we may think, our leaders need our prayers in these very difficult times, as do those who advise them, those who have to enforce regulations, those who carry out research into prevention and cure, those who care for the sick, and those whose lives are being turned upside down in so many different ways by this pandemic.

But we can trust in God. Like the Israelites, we seek, by His grace, to walk in His ways, to obey His commandments. We have seen far more of God's glory and the outpouring of His love even than ancient Israel. We see Jesus. We see how much God loves us in the self-sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, We experience His victory over sin, the world and the devil through the shedding of His Blood for us. We experience the Holy Spirit Who comes to us through Jesus, the expression of His perfect love. S Paul thinks of the rock which Moses struck to supply the people with water as a *type* of Jesus. The water from the rock quenched the Israelite's thirst. It washed them clean. It saved their lives. It enabled and empowered them to continue their journey and ultimately to complete it. The water which flowed from Jesus' side mingled with blood when He died on the cross is the water of life. Those who drink of it never thirst again. It cleanses us. It refreshes us. It enlivens and quickens us. The Water of Life, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, heals us, nourishes us, energises us, enables us and empowers us to face whatever challenges this life throws up for us and finally brings us home to dwell with Him for ever. There's nothing to fear. Just trust and obey.