

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Exodus 17:8-16 (OT page 75)

Reader: Andrew Thomson

Background to the reading

The people of God found themselves in the desert of Sinai at Rephidim. At first they were not very happy because they had no water. So they moaned and rebelled against God and his servant Moses. Moses pleaded with God and God provided them water out of a rock.

Rephidim was the last stopping-place of the Israelites on the Exodus from Egypt, before they reached Mt Sinai.. The site of Rephidim is uncertain, the usual suggestion being the Wadi Refayid in SW Sinai.

Then, to add to their distress, the Amalekites attacked them. They were the "first of the nations" to make war against Israel. The Amalekites were the descendants of Amalek, the son of Eliphaz and the grandson of Esau. Most probably the Amalekites who were a nomadic tribe, came to the mountain region of Sinai at the beginning of the summer because of the fact that it is cooler than the lower districts and there is more food for their animals.

But there was clearly no love between the Amalekites and Israel. IT IS clear from our reading that this was a Holy war between God and the descendants of Amalek. It is clear through the way Moses organize their defense. He chooses a young man Joshua, who later would become the leader of the people of God, to lead the battle. He himself went with Aaron and Hur to the summit of a hill to hold up the staff of God in his hands.

And then at the start of the attack whenever Moses' hands were in the air, the people of God advanced in the battle, but whenever he dropped his hands, they were losing.

So when Moses' hands got tired Aaron and Hur, held up his hands which meant that the people of God won the battle. Moses then erected an altar of the Lord which was typical in Old Testament times to show that God gave them the victory. I do not agree with the translation. I would keep to the original name namely Jaweh- nis shi like in the King James version, although the King James translation unfortunately says "Jehovah" which is offcourse grammatical wrong, but in the absence to describe the second Hebrew word, the King James translation is a better option. I think the closest we can come to explain the word is to say "The Lord has been the sign" or in other words "The Lord gave the victory over the Amalekites.

The meaning is clear: God gave them the victory. In the event He used His called servant Moses to direct His people. By helping Moses, Aaron and Hur played their part in the victory of Israel. Amen

MP 626

Teach my Thy way, O Lord

Sermon

The text verse for my reflection is verse 9 Moses said to Joshua, "Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands."

Yesterday I attended a conference presented by Scripture Union Scotland in Edinburgh with regard to the coming Holiday club and I came under the impression once again that we often speak of, or about and off course in the event to God without sometimes thinking about how we do it.

I was especially intrigued when one of the leaders of Scripture union said in his introductory statement: "God is going to do great things in Scotland this year". At first I thought, how does he know this? I mean we are humans and God is God. God is the Absolute Other and can do whatever He wills. We as humans have no power or control over God. We do not know what lies ahead or what God will be doing next. Everything about God is a mystery and we need to respect God for His grace and mercy. We can only say: Hopefully, by the grace of God we are looking forward to what God can do this year in Scotland...

It is also the same with prayers. I heard a lot of people praying: "We bless you God". No we are humans and we need the blessing of God. We cannot bless God. We cannot bless other human beings. We can only bless other people with the help and power and under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. Maybe people pray this because it sounds nice and powerful. And yes the way God blesses us are indeed powerful!

To me Moses is the role model of being a servant of God. He was human and acknowledged this all through his life. He got scared, he got angry, he lost his temper with God and his flock but he was always true to himself. But he never ever second guessed the Almighty deeds of God. In fact after each and every major event he either gave the place concerned a special name to remind the people of what happened at that specific place or he erected a monument giving the credit to God alone.

And this we clearly see in our reading this morning. Moses did not predicted the outcome of the war against the Amalekites. No he trusted in God and went up the hill with the staff of God in his hands. I can just imagine this sight. A frail old man with old hands holding on to the staff of God, yes holding it in the air on the hill for everyone to see,

knowing that he is a man of God, sent by God to lead them. A man that only relied on God. A man who was called by God, his servant. A man that did not have it easy.

But on the other hand no servant of God had it ever easy. This is clear as daylight. And if you do not believe me read the whole book of Exodus. Look at the life of Moses and Joshua. Go and read about the suffering of John the Baptist, Luther, Calvin and John Knox. Listen to the church gossip that is currently going around about how ministers/elders/deacons/readers in West Lothian are having to cope with all sorts of challenges.

Moses knew where his strength and comfort is. He knew that God is the only One to help and guide him. And because Moses knew God, he never ever had the audacity to treat God with disrespect and without honour. Something that we surely can learn from.

In our reading we see something remarkably happening. Moses got tired so his two companions gave him a stone to sit on. And then they took his arms and held it up. God was not only looking after his servant Moses – He was also giving Aaron and Hur the calling to help Moses. It is the same with us. God daily is looking after us through His Holy Spirit. But it is not something we can ever take for granted. It is only by the mercy and grace of God.

And God has indeed lifted our hands through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He saw that we are the losers in the battle against sin. So He became the VICTOR and ensured the victory over sin death and hell on our behalf. Yes and He calls His servants to serve Him and His people. But He also calls people to lift the hands of His servants.

Ministry can never be a one women/man act. It is always TEAMwork where the team strengthens each other, comfort one another and

forgive one another. A team where it is not about individuals but about God who calls and equips.

May we in Kirknewton and East Calder never ever stop lifting the hands of one another. And please dear congregation on the eve of my 5year anniversary in this congregation, do not stop lifting my hands because I must admit - Some days it is hard. There are days that I struggle to pray and speak to God. There are moments where I doubt and there are conversations and situations of conflict that I regret. There is no way I can continue my ministry here in Kirknewton and East Calder without your help, your prayers and your guidance.

amen