

Moses and Leadership

Slide – prime Minister : Leadership.

Back when I was planning the topics for our series on Moses, Theresa May was our Prime Minister.

Currently our Prime Minister is Boris Johnson but we live in such tumultuous times who knows what will happen next?

Leadership has wonderful opportunities and tremendous privileges but comes with responsibility. President Harry Truman coined the phrase “the buck stops here”. As President there could be no “passing the buck”, it stops on his desk.

Leadership has to be exercised with caution and restraint and the story from earlier in Moses life shows us that his arrogant assumption of leadership lead to an Egyptian being killed.

Did he think his position as a Prince in Egypt gave him automatic rights of leadership even to the extent of taking someone’s life? He was leading in his own way and in his own strength.

Moses flees to Midian and lives as a shepherd in the extended family of his father in law, Jethro the priest of Midian. Whatever Moses knew about God, or gods, his own personal encounter with Yahweh catapulted him very, very reluctantly into leadership.

He didn’t want to do it,
He didn’t want to go,
He didn’t feel equipped.

In the fantasy novels “The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy” the author Douglas Adams says that if anyone wants to be the president of the Galaxy they are automatically excluded because the sort of person who wants to be the president is in all likelihood the wrong person to be leader. Which is how Zaphod Beeblebrox,

the coolest cat in the Universe became President. I did say it was a fantasy novel.

It’s said our current Prime Minister wanted to be King of the World!

They act out this sort of idea in the house of commons when electing a new Speaker. John Bercow is standing down, and various people will put themselves forward for the role and there is an election. However, when the winner is announced they play out a little charade of dragging the new Speaker reluctantly to the Speaker’s chair. It captures that idea that no-one should be too keen for leadership.

Moses would have said “Amen” to that.

I think that Moses had in mind that he would do the whole “rescue the Israelites from Slavery” bit and then once they were set free he could clear off back home to his nice quite life minding the sheep.

So what happens?

Jane reminded us of the hostage negotiations, the plagues and the struggle and the final horrendous plague: the death of the firstborns on the night of Passover. Finally the people are set free.

They wander about a bit and it seems Moses is very closely in tune with God leading the people here and there until they come to the Red Sea. By now, Pharaoh has changed his mind and his coming with all his chariots and horses to get the Israelites back.

The people are afraid, but then comes the miracle of the parting of the red sea (we’ll come back to Moses and miracles later in the series) the people walk through and all the Egyptians are drowned.

Free, finally completely free.

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But by now, like it or not, Moses is clearly the leader of this people and it's Moses whose catching it in the neck.

We have no water

We have no food

We have no water (again)

And each time the people grumble and moan at their leader and Moses comes and complains to God. I can just imagine his prayer.

Listen God. They are at me again. I'm only here because you sent me and now I have to put up with all this moaning. It's not my fault. You need to do something. I didn't want this job in the first place and I don't want it now. What are you going to do? What am I to do with these people, they are ready to stone me (Ex17:4)

There will be those in church leadership, education, business, charity who will all resonate with Moses.

For whatever reason when things are all going wrong, it's all the Leaders fault.

A new chief executive is welcomed to his office by the outgoing chief executive who takes him aside, hands him three envelopes and says "when things are going wrong, open the first envelope". Actually things went very well for a time, but sure enough business started to slide. He remembered and opened the first envelope. Inside it said. Reorganise.

So he brought in a plan to reorganise and restructure the whole business and it worked a treat...but in time things started to slide again. He opened the second envelope. It said Rationalise.

So they went through a cost cutting and redundancy phase and the business picked up...but eventually things dipped and he

turned to the third envelope. Inside it said "prepare three envelopes."

Chapters 16,17 and 18 show us a leader who is fighting fires. A problem arrives, it gets sorted. Then another then another. There's no plan or organisation or structure. It's just 2 million people and one leader.

It takes a visit from Moses father-in-law, Jethro, to point out the obvious. Moses is acting as judge to the whole nation. I imagine the complaints would range from conflicts between the tribes over grazing and water to arguments over ownership of a cooking pot. Everything from the great to the least came to Moses.

Jethro points out there is another way and Moses is shown that he needs to collaborate. Ultimately the buck would still stop on his desk, but all the trivial minor matters could be handed to those appointed to senior management, middle management and junior management. This is where the huge extended tribe of Israel began to be organised and take the steps towards becoming a nation.

I would be interested in what you think. At what point did Moses accept his leadership role? I don't think it was at the burning bush. I don't think it was during the battle in Egypt. I don't think it was as he faced the problems when set free in the wilderness. At all these points he could happily have done a bunk.

I think it's here, when he has to create a structure with his own role more defined that he accepts the calling God has given.

Anyone who has ever aspired to a leadership position will have experienced what Roger McGough captured in his well known little poem

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I wanna be the leader
I wanna be the leader
Can I be the leader?
Can I? I can?
Promise? Promise?
Yippee I'm the leader
I'm the leader.

Ok. What shall we do?

What can we learn?

Whatever our leadership responsibility, as far as faith is concerned, we are not the leader, but a follower. Peter's leadership stemmed not from his gifts but from the recognition that Jesus was Messiah. That doesn't mean we don't have decisions to take and responsibilities, but we are called to follow Christ.

Collaboration is the surest way of discerning God's purpose and through prayer, reflection and open sharing God's purpose is made clear. Leadership is more about the discernment of God's purpose from among God's people, than thinking what to do next.

And all can show leadership by example. Our study on the fruits of the Spirit have shown the pathways to walk so that Christ's character develops in us. Not that we suggest "be like me", but we allow our own walk with Christ to be evident to others. Lead by example.

Ultimately any leadership, when rooted in faith in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can become a means of his grace. When His glory and honour are our hearts desire...we are on the right road.

Lord we pray for those in Leadership.

We pray for our Prime Minister, our Bishop elect Olivia, for Pam and Jo – co-headteachers at the primary school, and for all with a leadership responsibility here at Holy Trinity.

Lord grant us your mercy that your purpose will be served and your glory and honour will be our highest aim.

Lord in your mercy – hear our Prayer.