

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

18th November 2018

Numbers 11:16-30

Spirit... we need your imagination... that opens up the stories.. and sets them free once more... in each of us... in our community... that we might see what they call us towards.. and what they call us away from... May we have those eyes and ears... so be it... Amen...

After a very turbulent week... If I said... I wouldn't have that job for all the tea in China... to whom might I be referring?... as if I need to ask... They drink deep of a poisoned chalice... and I admire the tenacity... and strength... and even temerity of riding the rollercoaster of leading a nation... where no one is satisfied... and never once having to take to twitter...

I am less impressed by those who easily cry fowl... who misunderstood how difficult it is to unwrap yourself from something you were part of for generations... and who imagined you could just leave and you'd still have all the security... the standards... the justice... the trade... and access to food markets...

Now the reality is beginning to bite... life is going to be different... You can't keep saying... "It will all work out alright" as some said leading up to this crisis moment... When you make a break... you make a break... and no one gets all they want...

Sorry... Forgive me... I hope you don't think I'm talking about Brexit... I'm not... I'm talking about the Israelites in the wilderness having broken away from Egypt... but how uncannily similar it feels...

The passage today... is not one I chose... It never is... we always use a pattern of readings... a lectionary selected beyond this congregation... used all round the country and indeed world...

I don't know which soothsayer placed the wilderness passages in the lectionary for this month... but they are perfect frameworks for us... as we try to understand what Brexit means for us... but clearly... we've been here before...

So while we are confused and discombobulated... and we have little real idea of where to turn... we have a faith story that accompanies us... not with an answer... because the

bible isn't an answer to things... If it was then politicians and leaders would be quoting from it all the time and the churches would be full... The bible is instead a companion on the way... a book that gives insight on the human condition... recognising the places we repeatedly find ourselves... and with some intuition and imagination... offers us stories that give meaning to where we are and reimagine the future...

So we are in the wilderness... Moses is struggling in his leadership... He's receiving the Hebrew equivalent of the 1922 Committee letters of no confidence... The nation is wanting a peoples vote... They've been fed mana but want meat... they want to be part of the decision making process as to their future in the wilderness... Moses and God together create an inner cabinet... delegating powers to 70 elders or leaders... those who led the people out into 'freedom'... They are given new responsibilities... They all prophecy... sharing the responsibility... but very quickly many go quiet... prophesying only once... and don't last long in their role...

I'm not making this up... This is the story of Numbers this week... not Thursday's headlines...

And there is an interesting bit in the story... where it is noticed that there are two leaders... who have remained in the centre of the camp... rather than at the edge where the tabernacle is... Remember the tabernacle... the tent of the Lord... was where God dwelled... Yet here is one of the first moments... when God was found outside the tent... beyond the place God was meant to be... Here is God in the mundane... common places...

And Joshua discovers this... and complains... running to Moses to tell him... and you can hear Moses chuckle... delighted that this has happened... that God is now beyond the inner circle... beyond the human made holy place... and among the people... and he says simply... 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets'...

Would that all the Lord's people were prophets...

Can I dare suggest that in the middle of Brexit... perhaps as people of faith... that is just what we might be...

Perhaps one of the difficulties humans tend to have... especially in a community... is to imagine a future... that is different from the past... You can see that in the church regularly... It is difficult to dream into the future... We tend to get stuck in patterns of behaviour... and ideas... and traditions... and space... that are familiar...

But that is true way beyond the church... Its a pattern of behaviour that is central to trying to negotiate Brexit... both for those who want to leave... imagining it won't be that different in trade and security and science research etc... and those wanting to stay... because while it isn't perfect... its what we know and we can handle it... It's a pattern of behaviour that Mr Trump relies on... to make America Great Again...

The story of the past is much easier to tell than the reimagining of the future... and we grow into believing... our past behaviour shapes our future behaviour... and so the future becomes less open... and we accept history repeating itself... The future becomes more ominous... than promising...

However... we are people of faith... and despite tending towards tradition... we are best placed in our community... to offer a story that enables us to imagine the future in a different way...

Psychologists describe two siblings of the same abusive parent... can tell quite different stories of similar pasts... Each sibling interprets that fact quite differently... one perhaps quite ominously... and the other rises above it... and thus they shape quite different futures...

In the Bible... the past isn't just the past... The past is the interpreted past... The stories we tell are all interpretations of what that past meant... Few are accurate historically... The stories are told and retold because they interpret and thus help us understand the past... they give it meaning...

So how we tell our faith stories... shapes how we respond to the future... We could tell today's story... and most of our stories... as historical incidents... In doing so we simply detail all that went wrong with humanity... describe our sin that lead from fall to wilderness... from captivity to Calvary...

Or we could tell them... as faith stories are meant to be told... not about what went wrong... but about what believe can go right... Not about what we lack... but about what we have been given... Not stories that we use to expose our problems and shortcomings... but stories that lift us up... telling of the gift and blessings we have... that prepares us... shapes us... and invites the future.. .

We prophecy with our stories when we tell them in our communities... not because they have a particular solution to Brexit... they don't... they have an insight and hope for our humanity... They speak positively... hopefully... generously... of a love... that is present now... as the future is reimagined...

So Moses delights in others speaking out... in prophesying... It is a sign God is present in the common places... as the future is spoken of... a God present in the wilderness places... with imagination... and hope... not offering a repeat of the same patterns of behaviour... but a presence that is our companion as the future shifts... and is prepared for that future... whatever it may be...

This is our story to tell... Faith stories are our companion... when we move into a future different from the past... that speak not of things lost... but of thing yet to be... These stories accompany us... offer strength and hope... that prepare us for a reimagined tomorrow... with the confidence of God... of love... of life... every day...