

This has been a very strange week for me, I don't know whether you will notice or not but we have spent a lot of time this week involved in a deep clean of the building, as well as having safety checks complete. It has meant at one point moving all the furniture from upstairs – downstairs – and then putting it all back 2 days later after the carpets were dry. There was small group of us who 3 times this week spent a few hours just moving furniture from one place to another.

Mostly it went smoothly, despite the humidity this week which meant that it took longer than we had expected for many of the floors to dry at times – but it did mean I was also tied to the building a lot – so I got to do lots of paperwork!. In the midst of this I seemed to go to a lot of lunches as well – one to celebrate a birthday, and one to welcome someone to London. At one point someone asked me how my week was going and I didn't know how to answer – it was such a strange series of events and long days.

Then on Thursday I was at West London Crematorium to take the funeral of Mr Smith. It seemed a bit surreal in the middle of a week which seemed to be about furniture and lunches. Here in the midst of a week was a moment, a brief moment to give thanks for someone's life. I am always struck at funerals at the short time we have to give thanks for the gift of life, especially one that was 80 years long. But what I like about funerals is the stories – the stories people tell of memories – how we describe who a person is and what they meant to us.

How we describe our lives is an interesting gift. How we tell the story of our week, or how we reflect on the gift of a life that has come to its close. How we recount the adventures we have had on holiday or how we record why we are the people we have become.

Today in our scripture readings we hear two such accounts. One which recounts the birth of Moses, and one which record how the disciples were coming to understand who Jesus is.

The verses from the Exodus we hear this morning are set against a tragic scene of oppression. The systematic mistreatment of the Hebrews by Pharaoh escalates from enslavement (1:11, 13) to ethnic cleansing as Pharaoh commands that the Hebrew boys be killed at birth. These verses give us keen insight into the kind of psychology of hate that, driven by fear, can move whole societies to engage in genocidal acts. But where is God to be found in this story of hate, oppression, death, and defiance. The first mention of God in this story is not until 1:17, which speaks of the midwives' fear of God. Already, the story of oppression is well underway. But God's first explicit action does not come to the end of the chapter, and God remains in the background as abuse and oppression grow. Unlike the later chapters of Exodus, in which God takes direct action against Israel's opponents, this story reveals God's workings to be more subtle and indirect. In the work of the midwives, Pharaoh's daughter, and

Moses' mother and sister ... While the midwives are motivated by their fear of the Lord, and the mother by her attachment to the beautiful baby, the actions of Pharaohs' daughter emerge from her pity. But whatever their motivations, the actions of the women align with God's own life-giving work. The princess is not intentionally serving the Hebrew God when she rescues Moses. She sees the baby and hears his cries and she is able to acknowledge his vulnerability. And it is in this act that we see God at work more closely.

God creates us in God's image. But God also creates us with freewill. God can only act when we acknowledge who God is, and acknowledge the presence of God within us – those moments when we are most vulnerable, most human, but also most God-like or divine. God is present in the acts of mercy, in the one-prayer-at-a-time. The women in the story of Moses and Pharaoh have not only great courage, but they hold onto the one thing they feel they can change – none of them expect to change history, none of them are looking to save others – they are all focused on the one little thing – the one small baby in front of them. In a sense, they impact on history by this one small action of hope, courage and mercy.

God is at work in history, and in the present, in ways that we may never understand, but at the heart of this story and at the heart of God is the reminder that God calls us to be human, and to act out of that humanness at its best. And when we are humans at our best, our decisions and our actions are surrounded by those same virtues which the women in this story expressed – courage – mercy – hope – compassion, and it is in such virtues we find a way forward, one action at a time.

When we tell our stories, when we share our lives – do we look for the signs of God's action – do we remember to consider where God is at work in our experiences? We come to understand who we are, and who God is by in many ways, but one way is to take the time to consider where God has been at work this week – in our life's journey and in the journeys of those around us.

We see a glimpse of this in our Gospel reading and the interactions between Jesus and Peter as Jesus' identity is confirmed by the disciples. This reading is so often used to help us talk about identity, not only of Jesus and God, but of Peter and ourselves. But in showing us something of this identity we also get a glimpse of the hopes which make up this identity.

Jesus' identity is composed in the context of God's interaction with Israel. When Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah he has images of political independence for his people. Behind Peter's hopes is a political expectation that Rome would no longer wield its swords, that Rome would cede authority to the one true power of the universe. And when Jesus starts preaching about a kingdom of heaven which keys he has given to the faithful, you can only imagine the excitement these disciples would have felt, an excitement Jesus will reshape and redirect next week.

When we consider Jesus identity, I wonder what hopes we attach to it. Do we, like Peter attach an expectation to God that is not what God's intention in our life is!

Do we even take time to consider where God is in our context, in our expectations – and what do we then do when our expectations are not met?

But let's take a step back...one of the key parts of this gospel passage is the fact that Peter has courage, at this point in time to name Jesus as the Messiah, and not be afraid of it. In time he will go on to completely misunderstand what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, he will later resist Jesus' intention to turn himself over the authorities, and he will eventually deny and desert him. But for now... for now, in just this moment, he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. And that's something for which to give thanks.

It is also a lesson for us too! We could jump ahead to all the things we miss, to all that we hope for, for all that we wish God would fix. Or like Peter, like Pharaoh's daughter – we could focus on the moment in front of us – and cease it by the hand.

This is not for one moment to overlook all that still needs to be done, the important issues that surround us and even overwhelm us at times. But it is to claim that God is at work in our communities and in each of our lives, and if we can't sense and celebrate and give thanks for God being present in small things, how are we ever going to claim God's power and providence in larger things?

Gratitude is a powerful thing. Or, perhaps more accurately, gratitude is an empowering thing. And these readings gives us a chance to give thanks that we might be open to what God will do with us and for us and through us next.

It is also true with the story we heard of Moses, in the face of all the oppression that the Israelites are experiencing, in this moment when the baby Moses is rescued, there is a life, in fact several lives which can give thanks against the pain that surrounds them.

God is at work in our lives and in our communities this week.¹ And maybe over coffee, as we share the stories of our week, or even of our holidays we can take time too, to share where we saw and experienced God in our stories too.

The power of Peter's confession is that in this moment it gave strength and courage to the community. A courage that empowered them in the weeks that were to follow. Our stories should also do the same, as we face whatever the week holds for us, as we remember where God has already journeyed with us. Amen.

¹ <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/08/pentecost-12-a-pausing-to-give-thanks/>