

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4,12-16

08.10.17

*Connected*

Psalm 78, from which we have read and sung this morning, is not an obvious choice for a service when we are celebrating our children and young people's work. Written, apparently, at a dark time in Israel's history, this long psalm speaks of Israel's faithlessness and rebellion against God and the inevitable judgement that has followed. We, however, following readings set for today, have read only a sample of the psalm and what caught my eye for this morning's service is what it says about children and the responsibility of Israel to pass on its stories of God to future generations:

We will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,  
and the wonders he has done...

What we touch on here is a theme that we find again and again, especially in the Old Testament, and which goes something like this: God's people Israel have a story – in fact many stories: stories about God and about how God has intervened in their life and accompanied them, and these are the stories that Israel lives by. So you must teach them to your children. These stories give them their identity: they reveal to them the truth about God and of the world, and of who they are. They feed and fund Israel's imagination and help them to read the world in which they are set. So pass them on. In verses twelve to sixteen of the psalm the writer touches on some of these stories that cluster at the very heart of Israel's history and its faith, and which we have been following in recent weeks, about how this people were slaves in Egypt and how God rescued them and cared for them. And there is a reference to our other reading this morning, when God provided water from a rock when the people were thirsting in the wilderness.

Now, thinking about this community, passing on its stories from one generation to the next, brings to mind the world 'connected'. These stories, after all, provided a connection between the generations. They ensured continuity between parents and children as this common tradition was handed on and passed down. And it's that sense of connection that lies at the very heart of salvation in the Bible and what it means to be saved. One definition of sin is separation: separation between us and God, separation between us and our

fellow human beings, separation between us and ourselves, and separation between us and nature. But grace mends what has been torn apart; salvation unites what has become disconnected. And one enduring feature of human life is what we call the generation gap, the fact that always there is some degree of alienation between parents and children for they inherit different worlds and one so often fails to understand the other. And a story-telling community, a community that passes on the narratives, that retells the stories, is one that bridges that gap and stays connected.

I mentioned just now that one of our separations as human beings is from nature, and it's appropriate therefore that we consider this psalm not just today, when we celebrate our Sunday School and Junior church, but also just three days before October 4<sup>th</sup>, the feast day of St Francis of Assisi. St Francis is remembered for many things, not least – and sometimes rather sentimentally – for his keen appreciation of animals and of nature. And of course the proximity of Francis' feast day to our celebration of our children and young people is a reminder that it is not only the stories of the faith that we pass on to our children but the world itself, and the environment: what we call creation. Our children inherit the world from us. We pass it on. And here once again it is this sense of connectedness that we need to rediscover. One of the good things about the theory of evolution is that it reminds us of the connectedness of all living things, the fact that we are all creatures of one Creator who have evolved together through time. And of course as human beings we bear the image of God and that sets us apart, but that is not to separate us entirely from our fellow creatures. There is a false and destructive sense of disconnect that has set us over creation and made us cavalier and destructive of nature and the animal world – and again, that is a hallmark of sin, and salvation means reconnection. And recapturing a sense of that union with all created things is more urgent than ever today.

Connected. We did not read from the New Testament this morning but if we had I would have chosen verses from the letter to the Colossians. Speaking in exalted terms of the risen and ascended Christ, Paul says of Jesus, 'He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.' In Christ all things hold together. They connect. In him the generations hold together as stories and traditions and faith are handed down in the family of faith. In him all created things hold together in one bundle of creatureliness. In him all living

things hold together, animated by the spirit of life. In him the world and its loving Creator connect and are bound together in one eternal embrace.

And this morning we gather here at this table – one family, from the youngest to the oldest. And we tell the story again of liberation and redemption from slavery. And as our ancestors ate bread in the wilderness so we eat of the bread of life. And as our ancestors drank from the rock so we drink from the cup of salvation. And bread and wine, these products of the good earth, remind us of our connection with God's creation in all its delicate balance and which God has entrusted to us. And please God may we learn what it means to be connected to all things in heaven and on earth. Amen .