**Family Service Talk 28th February 2021**

**Psalm 106:1-2 + 6-12**

***1****Praise the Lord.*

*Give thanks to the**Lord, for he is good;
    his love endures forever.*

***2****Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord
    or fully declare his praise?.....*

***6****We have sinned, even as our ancestors did;
    we have done wrong and acted wickedly.****7****When our ancestors were in Egypt,
    they gave no thought to your miracles;
they did not remember your many kindnesses,
    and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=PSalm+106&version=NIV#fen-NIV-15659b)*]****8****Yet he saved them for his name’s sake,
    to make his mighty power known.****9****He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up;
    he led them through the depths as through a desert.****10****He saved them from the hand of the foe;
    from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.****11****The waters covered their adversaries;
    not one of them survived.****12****Then they believed his promises
    and sang his praise.*

Today’s talk is the 2nd in a short series for Lent called **‘Faithful God and Faithless Israel seen in Psalm 106.’** If at this point you are thinking …’that’s not really relevant to me … I **know** God is faithful … I am not a Jew so am not really interested in Israel c 3,500 years ago … I don’t really like long Psalms that go on and on for ever …’ and have started to plan your Tesco shopping list for this week or do your homework ……….. then let me stop you right there!

We can learn so much from this story and what is more, the Psalmist who wrote 106 knew that too. The Psalm was probably written as Israel returned to Jerusalem from captivity and he knew that , now more than ever, Israel needed to be reminded of God’s faithfulness in the midst of their faithlessness. An in these challenging times, we certainly need that reminder today.

So having started by thanking God for his love and praising him for his mighty acts, the Psalmist states the central problem then, as now in 2021 – humans are sinful.

He then goes on to summarise the story that we can read in Exodus 14. In brief … the Israelites had been brought to Egypt by Joseph when there was a famine in Canaan c 400 years earlier and they had settled and done really well … God had blessed them. In fact, that was one of the problems … there were now a great many of them and Pharaoh felt threatened by them. He made them all his slaves, treated them badly and tried to reduce their numbers but the nation of Israel kept growing bigger.

Then Moses arrives on the scene with all the ups and downs of his early life until eventually God meets with him and calls him to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and back to the promised land. That however was not a quick fix because Pharaoh did not actually want to lose all the Israelites – they were his entire work-force. Finally, after 10 plagues where the Egyptians suffered from frogs, rivers of blood, hail, flies, boils etc etc (and the Israelites did not), Pharaoh let the Israelites go.

What a relief and sense of freedom they must have felt as they left Egypt … no more slavery and they were going back to the land God had given them. God even went with them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. How thankful they must have been to God for rescuing them. **BUT** … how quickly their emotions and reactions changed when what looked like a cloud on the horizon turned out to be Pharaoh and hundreds of chariots and officers coming towards them – he had changed his mind.

And, of course, with hindsight and the amazing record of the event we can read in Exodus, we know that this was all part of God’s plan so that the Egyptians would know that he was the Lord. (Ex 14:18) However, the Israelites were terrified and went into total panic, blaming Moses, crying out in desperation to God and asking to go back to Egypt – it was total mayhem!

And into this chaos Moses spoke to the people … ‘Stand firm … and see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today’ (Ex 14:13). Moses knew and remembered how often God had worked to help his people, not just in his lifetime but going right back to his forefathers Jacob and Isaac and Abraham and beyond. And he had faith that God would do so again.

The people **knew** how God had previously worked in their lives but instead of remembering and having faith that he would rescue them again, they panicked and wanted to be anywhere but where they were, even if it meant going back to slavery in Egypt.

In fairness to the Israelites, on a human level, they were in a pretty bad situation … they were camped by the sea and Pharaoh and his huge army were galloping full tilt towards them … if they went one way, they faced certain drowning, if they went the other way, they would face the wrath and violence of the Egyptians. It was not looking good for the Israelites and I suspect in that situation, we would all panic and try to find a way out. If we are honest, our immediate response at a difficult moment is most likely to be from a human perspective and in that case the Israelites were doomed.

But this is where we must go back to the Psalmist who records the lack of faith of the Israelites when stuck between the sea and the Egyptian army and then says …. **Yet,** God saved them!

And we all know what happened next ... Moses held up his staff, the waters of the sea parted and the Israelites could walk across on dry ground before the waters flowed again, drowning the Egyptian army which was following them.

It’s a great story of God rescuing his people but we need to look a little further in Psalm 106 to discover why. Yes, these were God’s chosen people whom he had built into a nation and for whom he had big plans so he needed them to survive … but it was more than that. God could have rescued them in any way at all, he could have led them a different way so that they were nowhere near the sea. But God’s plan was for this to be more than a rescue. It was an opportunity for everyone to see and know that he was God and was all-powerful. Not from any sense of pride or arrogance (God is incapable of those emotions), but so that all people would know him, have faith in him and want to follow him.

And in our lives today, there are times when we ask God to help us and it seems that he is not answering, just like the Israelites felt when saw the Egyptian army coming towards them. But, in God’s timing, he does answer in his way and it is always better than our way! And in that answer, God’s faithfulness, power and presence is made clear and seen – often by many who would not have otherwise heard about him. And every time God’s faithfulness is clearly seen, it adds another layer to the bed of reasons why we should trust him and follow him in our lives.

And just like the Psalmist, **we** can record how God has been faithful to us, despite our lack of faith at times and, just like the Psalmist, we must end our record with ‘Then (we) believed his promises and sang his praise.’ (Psalm 106:12) Amen