

Dear Friends,

Exodus 17: 1-5a

Moses and the people are making the journey from slavery to the Promised Land, from fear and anxiety to trust and openness to God. It's a long journey which takes a lot of travelling. In the wilderness they are anxious about not having enough food, so God provides them with manna from heaven. They begin to learn to trust. But fear and anxiety soon find new footholds. The people become anxious again, this time because they do not have enough water. They become frightened again because without water they will not survive. They complain about the shortage. Their complaints become fierce. They are desperate, and desperate people do desperate things.

Moses can see that the atmosphere is turning nasty, the mood of the people is becoming ugly. He feels threatened and intimidated. He cries out to God and says, "The people are almost ready to stone me". God is teaching the people to let go of fear, but now their leader is afraid. Frightened people make bad leaders. They do terrible things. It will help the people if Moses can learn to let go of his fear. So, God gives Moses a lesson in two parts in how to handle fear. Today we will only have time for part one and you may not find part one all that comforting. But be assured there will be a second part to the lesson later in the week.

Before we see God's lesson for Moses, we do need to remind ourselves of a bit of wisdom from Mark Twain. He said "Some of the worst things in my life never even happened". Here is good news, many of the things we fear never do actually take place. We worry about them but they just don't come to pass. We look back and realise that all the worry was unnecessary.

For Moses, it is happening, the people are close to turning against him. He needs to sit down in God's class room, open his books and receive his training. The first part of the lesson goes like this. Moses has just told God that he's afraid that the people are about to pick up stones and throw them at him in order to kill him. In reply God says, "Pass before the people". If I were Moses this would not be what I wanted to hear. I would not want to be told to make myself a target in front of the people where I would be a sitting duck. I would want God to say, "Oh dear. Are they about to kill you? Well, don't bother going home to pack a bag, just make yourself scarce, run away, keep out of sight, hide until the danger is over and things settle down".

I am usually pretty reliable at turning up to take my services. But from time to time something does happen which makes me question whether I should make an appearance. It can happen like this; early on a Sunday morning I get a telephone call. It's someone who is usually very quiet. They say, "I'm not sure if I should be telling you this but there's a bit of disquiet amongst the people in the Church. They are actually feeling very cross with you and have decided to make their feelings known. Their plan is this, when you start to preach, they are all going to pick up their hymn books and they are going to throw them at you". I don't really want to

receive this kind of treatment, so the call makes me think twice about whether to turn up for the service.

God says to Moses, "Pass before the people. You need to face the monster you dread". God is setting the people free from fear. There is not usually a way around fear, most often you have to go through it. Moses as the leader has to set the example, he needs to be the model. He is feeling afraid. God therefore says "Face your fear, go through it. You will come out of it on the other side. And when you have come through it you will know that it did not overwhelm you. Then, next time the fear comes it will be a little more manageable, you won't need to be quite so frightened because you will know that you've faced it once and beaten it and you can face it again and get through it".

And maybe Moses said, "Is that all you've got? Can't you give me anything else to help me?" To which God says, "Well, there is something else ...."

The something else will have to wait for next time, but because I don't like the thought of leaving you with any trace of anxiety and fear let me give you a heads up. It may just be that part two of Moses lesson in how to handle fear is the reassurance that when he passes through the dreaded experience, he will not be alone, but God will be with him.

God bless you,

Tony