

Dear Friends,

Exodus 16: 9-10

Moses has led the people out of slavery. After slavery however, has come the wilderness where the people are hungry and thirsty. They have complained to Moses. They say, "You have brought us into this wilderness to kill us". Moses can see that the complaint is not really against him, it is against God. They are accusing God of wanting to destroy them. God's will however, is not that they should perish but that they should have life. Their eyes and hearts need to be opened to deeper truths about God.

Moses gathers the people and Aaron speaks to them. They had been looking back, although their memories of the past had not been accurate. They had forgotten what four hundred years of slavery had really been like. They had started to remember fondly their old normal. As Aaron spoke, they stopped looking back, turned around and looked forward. They had already entered the wilderness. The wilderness and its terrors were all around them, but when they looked ahead, they saw that the wilderness would get deeper, tougher and harder to bear. There was no doubt about it, what lay ahead was going to be terrible. The suffering had begun. It was going to get worse. A lot worse. They were going to need each other. They were going to need all the friends that they could get. They would need to pull out all the stops in order to take care of each other and to make sure that the most vulnerable, the most in need did not perish.

However, as they looked deeper into this terrifying wilderness, they saw something else. They saw the glory of God. It was still going to be a wilderness. There was no getting away from that. But they were not going to face it alone. God would not abandon them. God would keep the promise to be with them.

And perhaps they wondered what it was that they could see within this glory of God. Some of them perhaps said "It looks like a high pole topped by a shining snake made of bronze, copper or even fire". Others said "No, I don't think it's a snake. It looks more like a man, a human being who has been lifted up".

You know what it was. It was Jesus. Jesus lifted up in crucifixion. Because it is Jesus who is close to the Father's heart who makes God known. In his cross the glory of God shines because the cross proclaims God's love and that God is with us in our suffering. As the hymn says, "And when human hearts are breaking, under sorrow's iron rod, then they find that self-same aching deep within the heart of God". And it's not only the crucified Jesus that they could see. It's also the risen Jesus who said to his friends on the day of the resurrection "I am going ahead of you".

Moses and his people were going deep into the wilderness, but they were being given the promise that God would be there with them. We too are heading into a deep wilderness. We are going to need each other. We are going to need all the friends that we can get. We are going to need to pull out all the stops to take care

of each other and to make sure that the most vulnerable, the most in need don't perish. But we are not alone, Jesus is there ahead of us and he keeps his promise. He holds out his hand, places his finger upon you and says, "I am right here". He says "Remember I am with you always, to the end of the age".

God bless you,

Tony