

Reflections for Holiday Club volunteers and leaders



Story: Exodus 13: 17-22 (International Children's Bible)

The king sent the people out of Egypt. God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country. That road is the shortest way. But God said, "They might think they will have to fight. Then they might change their minds and go back to Egypt." So God led them through the desert toward the Red Sea. The Israelites were dressed for fighting when they left the land of Egypt.

Moses carried the bones of Joseph with him. Before Joseph died, he had made the sons of Israel promise to do this. He had said, "When God saves you, remember to carry my bones with you out of Egypt."

The people of Israel left Succoth and camped at Etham. Etham was on the edge of the desert. The Lord showed them the way. During the day he went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud. And during the night the Lord was in a pillar of fire to give them light. They could travel during the day or night. The pillar of cloud was always with them during the day. And the pillar of fire was always with them at night.

Reflection

The fertile land does not suddenly disappear into the desert. In between is the wilderness, a place where it is an "inbetween" or, if we are being poetic, a liminal place.

The wilderness in the Bible is always this place of transformation. In the Exodus story, it is a place where the soft people of the Egyptian cities and towns begin to change into the warriors we see conquering the Holy Land in later books of the Bible. These changes are physical – they become desert warriors and nomadic people. We hear them wailing for what they left behind, and their comforts, as harsh weather and limited food supplies change them physically. In the challenges they face, they are also psychologically and spiritually transformed from a people longing for comfort and sophistication and worshipping many Gods to one following a cloudy and fiery pillar that is the One God in the harsh desert.

Being a teenager or young adult is another one of those liminal journeys. While we may be appealing to younger people with this holiday club, it won't be long until the children we have this week will leave the safety of childhood and move into the liminal space between childhood and "full" adulthood. This change is physical, but it is also spiritual. Teenagers and young adults are no longer satisfied with cute colouring in of rainbows, nor are they entertained by stories that lack bite or are not grounded in how they experience the rest of their lives.

Those of us who are ministers or youth leaders frequently struggle with this liminal place. We try to entertain rather than understand that this is a place of transformation.

We sometimes carry our own “bones” of nostalgia and fail to provide the manna that our young people need to feed themselves or to point to the fiery pillar that shows our young people a new way to follow God from childhood certainties. Until we do this, it is easy for us all to get lost and wander- maybe never finding our way through...

1. What are the ways we can listen to the Spirit to create a space to help equip our young people with us this week to prepare for their coming journey into their future?
2. How can we begin to equip ourselves to be their friends and guides this week?
3. We frequently base our own assumptions of what is needed this week on our own experiences (however far off!). Test those assumptions of what is needed this week with those around you of differing ages.

Guide me, O thou great redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven
feed me now and evermore.



Story: 1 Samuel 3: 1-11 (International Children's Bible)

The boy Samuel served the Lord under Eli. In those days the Lord did not speak directly to people very often. There were very few visions. Eli's eyes were so weak he was almost blind. One night he was lying in bed. Samuel was also in bed in the Lord's Holy Tent. The Ark of the Covenant was in the Holy Tent. God's lamp was still burning. Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, "I am here!" He ran to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me."

But Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed.

The Lord called again, "Samuel!"

Samuel again went to Eli and said, "I am here. You called me." Again Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed."

Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The Lord had not spoken directly to him yet. The Lord called Samuel for the third time. Samuel got up and went to Eli.

He said, "I am here. You called me."

Then Eli realized the Lord was calling the boy. So he told Samuel, "Go to bed. If he calls you again, say, 'Speak, Lord. I am your servant, and I am listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in bed.

The Lord came and stood there. He called as he had before. He said, "Samuel, Samuel!" Samuel said, "Speak, Lord. I am your servant, and I am listening."

The Lord said to Samuel, “See, I am going to do something in Israel. It will shock those who hear about it.”

Reflection

Samuel was a miracle baby, one his mother had so longed for after years of infertility. True to her vow, though, she gave him up to serve God as she had promised (1 Samuel 1:27). Eli also no doubt longed for a son. While he did have sons of his own, they were wicked (1 Samuel 2:12-16) and they were not suitable to follow him honourably in God’s service. So God also gave to his care Samuel, who grew to be a great prophet.

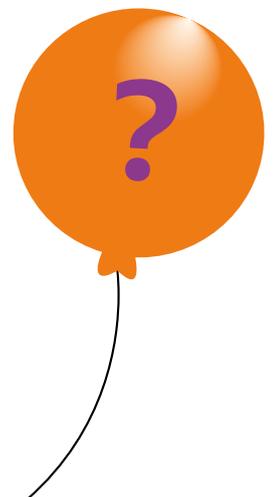
We often long for our “own” children in church, remembering full Sunday schools and glorious outings and activities from long past. We may have a few children occasionally or, if we are lucky, enough to do some meaningful work with regularly. And just like Hannah and Eli, we have great hopes for them as they grow, that they will be the people who will continue our beloved churches into the future.

But we need to make sure we recognise that God will call them into their own future – one beyond our imaginings. It is not up to us to cage and confine them by our own hopes and expectations. I suspect neither Hannah nor Eli had a glimmer of who Samuel was to become: a mighty hero of Israel, a renaissance man in both literal and figurative terms – a seer, priest, judge, prophet, and military leader. The maker and breaker of kings.

We cannot begin to imagine what the future for the children in our churches will be like when they are our age – any more than our parents and grandparents could imagine ours. Our role this week is to put them in a place where they can discern the begging of God’s whispering call in their lives – let’s trust God with their future and deal with the present and all the fun we can have this week.

1. When did you first hear God’s whispering call?
2. How much has the church changed since you were the children’s age? How does that feel?
3. The church of the future is likely to be humbler, more missional and more engaged locally in a world that is radically different to the Christendom that died sometime in the last century. How does this prediction make you feel?

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?





Story: John 6: 1-14 (International Children's Bible)

After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias). Many people followed him because they saw the miracles he did to heal the sick. Jesus went up on a hill and there sat down with his followers. It was almost the time for the Jewish Passover Feast.

Jesus looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him. He said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread for all these people to eat?" (Jesus asked Philip this question to test him. Jesus already knew what he planned to do.)

Philip answered, "Someone would have to work almost a year to buy enough bread for each person here to have only a little piece."

Another follower there was Andrew. He was Simon Peter's brother. Andrew said, "Here is a boy with five loaves of barley bread and two little fish. But that is not enough for so many people."

Jesus said, "Tell the people to sit down." This was a very grassy place. There were about 5,000 men who sat down there. Then Jesus took the loaves of bread. He thanked God for the bread and gave it to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish. He gave them as much as they wanted.

They all had enough to eat. When they had finished, Jesus said to his followers, "Gather the pieces of fish and bread that were not eaten. Don't waste anything." So they gathered up the pieces that were left. They filled 12 large baskets with the pieces that were left of the five barley loaves.

The people saw this miracle that Jesus did. They said, "He must truly be the Prophet who is coming into the world."

Reflection

This account occurs in what we normally call the Book of Signs – the early part of John's Gospel. This is the part where John provides proof through wonders and miracles that Jesus was the Messiah. Much of it operates on two levels – the literal and the metaphorical. Many of the characters Jesus meets in this early part of the Gospel, such as the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus, see only the literal meanings of Jesus' words without looking at the deeper meaning.

We can write this off as an account of mass catering via miracle or (if we struggle with the miraculous) a miracle of sharing. But of course, that's just one level that this account works at.

The crowd is not coming to be fed by this catering trick but rather by Jesus' words and actions. Their predominant hunger is not for the physical but the spiritual. Jesus doesn't spend a lot of time organising the catering – he spends most of his time praying with people and being with them.

It's easy for us to be busy this week dealing with all the practicalities a week like this entails. Indeed, there is no way we have got this far without a great deal of effort and energy. I remember after running Supersleuths last year, while the children wept it was all over, I confessed I was relieved – I was exhausted!

But if all we do this week is to be busy, we are missing the deeper and more satisfying part of this week – to form relationships with our young folk, learn from each other and enjoy ourselves. And at this midweek point, it's good to remember that.

1. How are you balancing the need to be organised with the need to spend time with our young people?
2. What are the things for you as a team that can make it easier to be busy than be relational?
3. At this midpoint of the week, how do we make sure that we have enough energy to get through the week?

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.



Story: Acts 16: 11-15 (International children's version)

We left Troas in a ship, and we sailed straight to the island of Samothrace. The next day we sailed to Neapolis. Then we went by land to Philippi, the leading city in that part of Macedonia. It is also a Roman colony. We stayed there for several days.

On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate to the river. There we thought we would find a special place for prayer. Some women had gathered there, so we sat down and talked with them. There was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira. Her job was selling purple cloth. She worshiped the true God. The Lord opened her mind to pay attention to what Paul was saying. She and all the people in her house were baptized. Then Lydia invited us to her home. She said, "If you think I am truly a believer in the Lord, then come stay in my house." And she persuaded us to stay with her.

Reflection

Here we see a very important event – the Church moving from the Near East into Europe. And for this to happen, there needed to be several things in place – the first was that church did not occur in a building but in a place that was easily accessed by the community. The second was a willingness to engage with the people who came there. The third was finding someone who could get enthused and carry it forward – Lydia the purple seller. Strangely, we know little about Lydia. There is speculation about her marital status – she was probably a wealthy widow in charge of her household. We assume she was Greek but we are not sure. All we really know is she was in the right place at the right time to do the work God needed to be

done. I am not sure Luke and Paul were expecting a Greek woman to be the person God had tasked with leading the first European community of believers. This week may have brought us new people or people only marginally known by the church into the sessions we have been doing. Their reasons may be as varied as “This is cheap childcare” to wanting the children to learn something about faith, and everything in between. It is easy to cynically dismiss them or attempt to pressure them into “coming to proper church”. But perhaps it would be helpful to see them as the people we would meet at the river if we didn’t have a more formal place to pray ourselves. This is an opportunity to have a conversation, to meet people outside “proper” church and find out how God might be working in their lives. Perhaps this week we will be lucky enough to find a Lydia (who might not be the type of person we were expecting) but we should also be grateful to be chatting to all who come to the river to be with us.

1. It can be hard to engage with unfamiliar people and be sure about what their motivations in coming to this week. We may also have unrealistic hopes about further engagement. How much of this has this been your experience?
2. Have there been times to interact with the people bringing the children to the activities? If so, what have they taught you about God? If not, how could you find an opportunity to interact with them?
3. How could you continue to have conversations at “the river place” after this week is over? As I went down in the river to pray Studying about that good ol’ way And who shall wear the robe and crown Good Lord, show me the way



Story: Mark 11: 1-11 (International Children’s Bible)

Jesus and his followers were coming closer to Jerusalem. They came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany near the Mount of Olives. There Jesus sent two of his followers. He said to them, “Go to the town you see there. When you enter it, you will find a colt tied which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here to me. If anyone asks you why you are doing this, tell him, ‘The Master needs the colt. He will send it back soon.’” The followers went into the town. They found a colt tied in the street near the door of a house, and they untied it. Some people were standing there and asked, “What are you doing? Why are you untying that colt?” The followers answered the way Jesus told them to answer. And the people let them take the colt. The followers brought the colt to Jesus. They put their coats on the colt, and Jesus sat on it. Many people spread their coats on the road. Others cut branches in the fields and spread the branches on the road. Some of the people were walking ahead of Jesus. Others were following him. All of them were shouting,

“Praise God! God bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the kingdom of our father David! That kingdom is coming! Praise to God in heaven!”

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. When he had looked at everything, and since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the 12 apostles.

Reflection

Last Palm Sunday we had a parade of our young people coming in with palms made before the service. We broke out the percussion and had a great time. In my reflections, I spoke of the fact that it was a political act – Jesus openly declaring his messiahship into a Jerusalem that is swollen with pilgrims and seething with intrigue and unrest. This is the act that spreads alarm amongst the Sadducees (temple officials) who want to remain apolitical and maintain their aristocratic importance, busying themselves with religious duties. Their aim is to preserve the temple, keep their advantages and keep their heads down. We know that they were unsuccessful. Within 50 years of the events in our reading, the temple and the Sadducees are no more and their temple a ruin – their people dispersed.

For all of us, this week will have been different from business as usual. No doubt at times it's felt like hard work and you're tired. But hopefully you have had fun, learnt things yourselves and made new friends. Just like Palm Sunday, we should celebrate our shared discipleship together, congratulate everyone who has been part of the week on a job well done and at the very least reward ourselves with chocolate (Fairtrade of course)! Events like this give us hope for the future of our beloved communities. Hopefully this week has been a taste of what church and working with young people could be in your church... and what the future should look like. If this has been affirming and life giving, pray and dream about what could be next... But for now, celebrate! You have done a yeoman's service!

1. What has been the best things about this week? What have been the challenges?
2. What could we take from this week into the regular life of our church?
3. What is God calling for your church to be and do? What do you need to make it happen?

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go;
from the old things to the new
keep me traveling along with you.

