

Moses to Joshua

Our readings today allow us to contrast three leaders and as it so happens we find ourselves in a General Election where we are invited to consider which leader we now want!

You might vote for the MP you want or along party lines or for the MP in a party because of its leader and no doubt the successes, failures, habits and ideas of all the leaders will be broadcast to us over the next five weeks.

If Moses, Joshua and St.Peter were standing for election...which would you go for?

One has a murder on his CV and a track record of anger.
One is known for a denial of any association with Jesus and an open-mouth-insert-foot habit.

Of the three Joshua stands out head and shoulders when it comes to his CV and yet there is something curious...I will end with that today.

Today is the Sunday nearest to All Saints and at morning prayer this week we have been thinking of ourselves as saints...after all the bible refers to all believers as saints. We agreed we were a pretty flawed bunch of saints but I think that puts us on a par with all the saints now in glory. Very few were the kind of Godly soul we think saints ought to be.

At a funeral we rarely ever make negative comment about the deceased it wouldn't be right. We know though that they weren't without their flaws.

That said – I once conducted a funeral and the man's son gave the main eulogy. He started off with great honesty. Let's be honest (he said) my dad wasn't a nice man!!

As flawed saints we are certainly in good company with Moses and St.Peter and yet God used both these individuals to lead his people.

After Joshua becomes Israel's leader it says this of Moses in Deuteronomy 34 v 10 ff. ¹⁰ Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,¹¹ who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

And yet his flaws were significant enough to prevent him going into the promised land. In numbers chapter 20 we read of another occasion when the Israelites had no water. God instructed Moses to take his staff, by which he had done so many miracles...but he was to speak to the rock and water would flow out.

Moses though loses his cool with the Israelites

"Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" ¹¹ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out,

¹² the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

The greatest leader Israel ever had in terms of signs and wonders, the leader who met with God face to face, is a flawed individual with a nasty temper.

St.Peter was equally flawed. He was impetuous and a little reckless and promises faithfully that he will never leave Jesus. We know the

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story. Jesus tells him that before the cock crows, he will deny even knowing Jesus three times.

On the night Jesus was arrested he was taken to the house of Caiaphus the high priest where he was illegally tried. Peter gets into the courtyard to be as near Jesus as he could get, but when challenged if he knows Jesus he denies it three times. And then the cock crows.

On our trip to Israel we visited the same place. Inevitably there is a church on the spot, but it is 99.99% certain this was the place where the high priests house stood.

We were taken into the dungeons where Jesus was held. We saw the stairway, the pathway he was brought from the garden of Gethsemane. While I was looking around and thinking of the night Jesus was arrested, in a nearby garden, a cock crowed.

It's easy to condemn Peter, but we too are flawed saints and besides I learned something I didn't realise before. I've always regarded the three denials as Peter's attempt simply to avoid being known...maybe being arrested, but our Palestinian guide explained a deeper level.

Jesus was being tried. The witnesses against him were terrible witnesses. They couldn't really get anything of substance. But Peter had heard Jesus say things that would be sufficient to condemn him. Peter was between a rock and a hard place. If he admitted he knew Jesus, he would be dragged in to give testimony against him. If he denies he knows him...he is letting down his Lord and Saviour. That's the route he took because he didn't want to be the means of Jesus downfall.

And yet this is the man chosen to lead the church after the ascension. The story from the Gospel today is widely regarded as

Peter re-instatement. The painful three questions – do you love me...and the commissioning to be the Shepherd of the new church.

Of the three though Joshua has the best CV perhaps he can be our saint?

He is a warrior of renown leading the army to victory.

He is Moses personal Aide.

When Moses met with God in the tent, Joshua was there and would stay in the tent when Moses left.

When Moses was on the mountain to receive the law, Joshua was with him.

Joshua was a spy and of the 12 sent into Canaan, only Joshua and Caleb had the faith to see God would give victory.

He was chosen as Moses successor and Moses laid hands on him as a sign of blessing.

There are 221 references to Joshua in the bible and he does everything right, is completely committed in faith and is a tremendous leader after Moses.

He has got EVERYTHING going for him.

But – on seven occasions he was told be strong and courageous.

It feels like telling Boris Johnson to have a bit of self belief.

There must then have been an aspect of his character that is hidden from us in all the stories of Joshua to have as his personal mantra – be strong and courageous.

He IS strong and courageous...but I think he suffered from fear and only overcomes through God's grace. (you may disagree).

So what can we take from thinking of these three characters.

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We can learn that it is important to mentor younger leaders.

We can recognise that whatever our past and whatever flaws we feel are shameful, or embarrassing, God doesn't see us the way we see ourselves.

We can be so very hard on ourselves can't we? Very judgemental.

God does not see us the way we see ourselves and all of us have a part to play in building his kingdom whatever the mistakes of the past or of character.

But the message that comes out loud and clear is that we too should be strong and courageous.

It's when we are afraid but we are obedient that God can use us. It's when we feel ill equipped and flawed like Moses with his speech problems, that God can use us.

It's saying Yes to God when we have no idea how we might accomplish what he requires.