

The Moses saga in the OT is a favorite of mine. He's a down to earth guy with no religious veneer, no pious talk. He says it like it is, and often says what I am thinking. Then there is Israel, a group of people on a long journey, who grumble and complain as much as 3 teenagers on a family vacation. They are on a journey which requires constant adaptation and provides little comfort.

Israel is leaving behind an oppressive system of slavery but have not yet tasted the fruit of freedom. As they tediously trudge through the wilderness, their nerves get frayed, and their patience wears thin. Their memories of the past glow with sentimental images: they forget the brick making and remember the cucumbers.

Moses and Israel are easy for us to understand. They are bonded together on this journey into the unknown, pulled forward by a promise – a dream – a hope – of a land of milk and honey, a place to call home once again.....if only they can survive to get there.

They had met their God on Mt Sinai, a God who promises to travel with them. But it seems to me that when you travel with God it is not always clear which way is forward, or that you will make it to the end.

Today's drama is over meat. They have manna, but that is all that they have. They are full, butwell, I sympathize with their desire for a little variety.

Likewise I can sympathize with Moses: he's the one up front so he's the target as the rabble riles up the crowd and demands meat. Meat? Moses says. Where am I supposed to find meat?

So the people take their problem to Moses and Moses takes it to the Lord in prayer, although it sounds as if he is shouting at God – saying something like “this was never my idea to begin with!”

This story may have come out of the Arabian desert 8.000 years ago but it resonates with our human experiences today – we who are tired of zoom meetings and jigsaw puzzles and drive by birthdays. And who, as a church long for overflowing SS rooms and 20 people in the choir and standing room only at Easter.

The punch however isn't in the complaints or the frustration but in the Question at the center of the drama. NOT “Where can I find meat?” but rather “What kind of God are you and get you get us out of this mess?”

Moses stands in the breach between cantankerous and rebellious people and an incomprehensible God who hides his face too often to please us and whose response is often unsatisfying. In the same way we often stand between hopes and harsh realities; in the midst of unpredictable circumstances without a compass.

Sure, at Mt Sinai YH had proclaimed to all “I will be your God and you will be my people” but today there is a crisis so the question is Can we trust you?

Under it all is the fear that they’ve been led out into no man’s land to die – alone and unremembered. There is a fear that they will never see the promised land; that it is all a mirage. Is this God friend or foe? Because frankly it is not always clear: not to Israel and not to us. We are afraid and no one likes looking like a fool.

Israel journeyed together for 40 years – time for a whole generation to pass away, those who had clung to old ways, old habits, and memories from the past. It took 40 years to turn this new people around: from looking backward to Egypt to looking forward with hope. For us, it has taken a pandemic.

But our questions still remain

What kind of God are you?

Will you provide for your people?

Are you a God who comforts us in the night and brings peace to weary souls or are you an angry, wrathful God?

Are you a God who will be satisfied with offerings and sacrifices, beautiful music and a good feeding ministry?

Will you stand by me even when I ignore or abandon you?

Will you make everything right? Make it OK according to my plan?

And on the last day, can I trust you? Because in the end, trust is faith.

These are the questions of faith that we ask over a lifetime of journeying through our own wildernesses. Each time you stand in a barren place with no hint of life, where you are struggling to muster hope for tomorrow – and you are suspicious that you are alone – these are the questions you will ask.

Can I trust you God – this God whom I cannot see and who seems so far away?

As we join in communion today, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with generations who have shared this meal – we join with others around the country and around the world, listening for the promise of forgiveness. Then, when we taste the bread and wine we will taste again the answer to our Q: What kind of God are you?

- The kind who carried the cross into death and then rose to carry us to new life as well.

We return often to the table because OUR journey often leaves us grumbling and wondering. Each time we take and eat we are reminded that no matter how bleak the horizon THIS is our God, the one who loved us through death into life.

From Moses to me, it's the question with which we all wrestle. Can I trust you?

As we share this holy meal today, we are reminded that Jesus is -and will always be - the promise we can trust.

Come and eat for the feast is ready.