

21.9.14

**EXODUS 16:1-20**  
**MATTHEW 20:1-16**

**BECOMING WHO WE'RE MEANT TO BE**

As a student at university, our church ran something called 'hospitality Sunday'.....sign up.....allocated Ray and Peggy . Older students said I was on to a winner- I was!

Hospitality certainly included a lot of food and drink but it was much more. A place to be 'at home' – instead of student room, to have a mother/father figure, to be looked after, to relate in a different way.

I think hospitality is about a kind of welcome, an openness; it's a gift that helps someone to be 'at home'. In its most profound sense it's about someone being able to be themselves, even learning a bit more about what that means.

In the case of God's hospitality it's about his gracious welcome and acceptance, arms open at the door, come on in, I'm glad you're here, whatever you look like, whatever's the matter, whatever you've done, There are so many stories that give us a glimpse of what it all really means until eventually we read about the banquet in heaven where we become the honoured guests, finally back home where we belong, as the people we're meant to be.

But what about these two stories today? Where is God's hospitality when people have nothing to eat?! The story is really much more They're about people learning to be who they are meant to be, both in a as people God has chosen specially.

So we have a wandering bunch of Israelites. Chosen by God but at this stage just a ragged collection of a rabble who can't quite let go of their past, even though it was awful. They were slaves, you'd think they'd be glad to have got away but after a while they're saying they wish they could go back, it was better, they got more food.

*You sometimes hear about people in situations of domestic violence who hate what's going on but keep going back, or addicts who know things are bad but cant break the habit or people who are unhappy in one situation or another and know they could leave but somehow would rather stick with a familiar place, even if it's bad.*

The lesson for the Israelites was about learning who they were and who they were meant to be. That is, they needed to realise they were people who belonged to God, had been chosen and rescued by God and therefore they were people who really could trust God to give what they need.

It's quite amazing – end of chapter 14 they have got over the Red sea and the comment is 'the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant' but then they get into the desert, they're thirsty and they start to grumble. When they're hungry as well they're saying 'If only we had died in Egypt...' How soon they have turned from putting their trust in God to wishing they were still in egypt. And in chapter 17 they say 'is the Lord among us or not? (v.7) How easy it is to fade away from trust and begin to doubt and question....

Notice that they don't even realise that they are really complaining about God – Moses has to tell them *'It's not us, it's God you're grumbling*

*about'* - there's a clear sign that they just haven't got the relationship right.

They still haven't got it, but in his immense grace God is accepting and generous and food comes from nowhere. And they still don't realise and some of them try stockpiling and it all goes off. (it is still a lesson we struggle to learn today....mountains of waste pile up)

Those people didn't just need food, they needed to learn who they were: chosen, special, needing to act as if they believed it.

And so to a different story about someone who wants to show that he can be as generous as he likes but that there's no room for expecting that anyone deserves better than anyone else.

When it seems like God has got it wrong for us and we are 'driven into the desert' as it were, when the doubts come in about God and we jolly well don't feel beloved and chosen, what happens? When it seems that someone else gets more than they deserve, Do we go for satisfaction in the ways our gut instincts take us? Do we start taking the risks or aiming for popularity with other people? Do we go for a sense of influence even if it means selling out to dubious ideas?

The Israelites and Jesus were chosen, beloved, belonging to God. In their different deserts, the Israelites had enough in the end; Jesus kept his fast and stayed physically hungry;

But the Israelites and Jesus were discovering something more than whether God could provide food from nowhere or not. They were discovering who they were – people loved, accepted, welcomed – and needing to act as if they believed it.

For us:

- Does our hospitality help others to be 'at home'
- Do we tend to stockpile, rather than believe we'll have enough for the day
- Do we find it easier to gumble to the middlemen because we don't have a good enough relationship with the one in charge?

God's hospitality – a gracious welcome, but also a place to help us to learn who we're really meant to be.