

DATE: Sunday August 22, 2021
CHURCH: St Matthew's Kensington.
SERMON SERIES. Exodus
BIBLE PASSAGE: Exodus 6:28-7:24
GENERAL THEME/TOPIC: Plague #1

In our series of sermons in the Book of Exodus, we come today to the beginning of the well-known 10 Plagues of Egypt. We can all recite a number of numbered things ... the 10 Commandments ... the 9 Fruit of the Spirit ... the names of the 12 disciples. Outside the Bible we may know the names of the 7 Dwarfs (if you don't, you're not *happy*); the 7 Deadly Sins; the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World.**

We could have a GO at naming the 10 plagues of Egypt, but if you're like me, you get a bit hazy over these things. But here is the list – (1) Nile turned to blood. (2) Frogs. (3) Gnats or sandflies. (4) Flies. (5) Livestock disease. (6) Boils and sores. (7) Hailstorms, thunderstorms. (8) Locusts. (9) Darkness (eclipse). (10). Death of the first born. Practising Jews know these plagues very well because they are recited each year during the Passover ceremony.

This series of natural disasters was seen to be the hand of God acting against Pharaoh in particular, and against the Egyptians in general. These disasters were seen as punishing the Pharaoh and his people for their ongoing detention of the Hebrews, refusing to let the Hebrews go out into the desert, there to worship God and sacrifice to God.

I may get into trouble here - but I am suggesting that the plagues that fell on Pharaoh and Egypt – except for the 10th – followed a recognisable pattern of natural phenomena in Egypt.

In our reading today from Exodus 7 God said to Moses and Aaron, “Stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, their rivers, their canals and their ponds, and all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt. (Exodus 7:19).

One of the great engineering and construction achievements in Egypt is the Aswan High Dam. It's enormous, and holds back the Nile, providing water for hydro-electric power, for irrigation and agricultural production, and to regulate the flooding of the Nile. Prior to the building of the Aswan High Dam, the Nile flooded every year, and spilled over its banks, depositing red alluvial soil along the river.

On this occasion when Moses was speaking with Pharaoh, the Nile flood was especially high and long lasting. It was as though Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1834 poem, 'The Rime Of The Ancient Mariner' was in view ... “Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.” The Nile was a super-saturated solution of red desert soil held in suspension – the canals, the pools, the lagoons, the ponds all filled with this reddish, thickish fluid. If you have ever smelled a river in flood, it is not dissimilar to the smell of blood. The Nile looked like blood, smelled like blood, felt like blood. To all intents and purposes, to people who had very little knowledge of haematology, it was blood. This god of theirs ... and the Nile was seen as a manifestation of the god Hapi (their god of natural fertility) ... had been shown to be not as strong as the God of the Hebrews.

But it all had no effect on Pharaoh. He rode out this event, and did not let the Hebrews go. And so came the second plague – the plague of frogs. They left their flooded burrows and tunnels and the swiftly-flowing flood waters, and came up on to the land – all over it – into people’s houses, befouling their stores and supplies. The frog was a representation of the Egyptian god Heq-tith, another god of fertility – but here was Heq-tith being a complete nuisance to the people, and not as strong as the god of the Hebrews.

The Nile and the frogs and the other 8 plagues – were signs of God’s displeasure with Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

There’s just one point I want to make out of all this. The Nile phenomenon must have raised Moses’ and Aaron’s reputations among the Hebrews. What a powerful demonstration of their relationship with God, and of God’s relationship with them. The Nile was a manifestation, or an avatar of the god Hapi, and had been trounced by the Hebrew’s God, and God’s representative.

Wouldn’t it be great for us, these days, to have such a sign from God. How we wish for something like this, so that the whole jolly world might see the power of God, might bring themselves under the authority of such a demonstrably powerful God.

But as much as we may wish it and long for it, it isn’t going to happen. “For we walk by faith and not by sight,” St Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus said to his disciple Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed.” (John 20:29).

Biblical faith is not believing without evidence. Biblical faith is trusting what you have good evidence to believe is true. Those early Hebrews in Moses’ day certainly saw the evidence of the red river. So they had that basis on which to put their faith in God, and in Moses and Aaron.

One of Jesus’ criticisms of the people of his day was that they hankered after a sign. “Show us a miracle,” they said, “and we’ll believe in you.” 5,000 of them had just been fed by Jesus in the desert, but **that** wasn’t enough of a sign for them ...they probably wanted to see another Red Nile.

The sign that we have in front of us all the time these days – is fruit. 9 pieces of fruit – the fruit of the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. They were seen in Jesus and even on the cross Jesus was demonstrating these Spirit-fruits as he hung there.

I wonder if, in the quietness of your heart right now, you would bring to mind a Christian person you know, and quickly examine that person’s life to see which of the fruit of the Spirit you can see in him. or her? Does that person demonstrate love? Joy? Peace? Patience? Kindness? Goodness? Gentleness Faithfulness? Self-control?

Sure, they are not as dramatic signs as a Red Nile. But they are much longer-lasting. They are not a sign of God’s presence that will knock the socks off the people who see it – but they are a sign of God’s presence that will make a lasting impression. They are not a sign of God’s presence that will have people cowering in fear before a powerful, all-conquering monarchical God. But they are a sign of God’s presence that bring grace and peace to those

who have them, and to those who observe them ... and that bring grace and peace to the communities and congregations where the possessors gather, and that bring grace and peace to the small part of the world in which they live.

God's great power that was seen in the first plague of the red Nile was only temporary. God's peaceful and loving presence seen in the lives of those who have given their lives to God is ongoing and eternal.

May we see the fruit of the Spirit among us in all we say and do, and thus see God's peace and grace among us. (1,219 words)

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10 Commandments. (1) You shall have no other gods before me. (2) You shall not make for yourself a graven image. (3) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. (4) Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. (5) Honour your father and your mother. (6) You shall do no murder. (7) You shall not commit adultery. (8) You shall not steal. (9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. (10) You shall not covet.

9 Fruit of the Spirit. (1) Love. (2) Joy (3) Peace (4) Patience (5) Kindness (6) Goodness (7) Gentleness (8) Faithfulness (9) Self-Control.

12 Disciples. (1) Peter. (2) Andrew. (3) James. (4) John. (5) Philip. (6) Bartholomew. (7) Matthew. (8) Thomas. (9) James son of Alphaeus. (10) Simon the Zealot (11) Judas son of James. (12) Judas Iscariot.

7 Dwarfs. (1) Bashful. (2) Doc. (3) Dopey. (4) Happy. (5) Sleepy (6) Sneezy. (7) Grumpy.

7 Deadly sins. (1) Pride, (2) Greed, or covetousness, (3) Lust, or inordinate or illicit sexual desire, (4) Envy, (5) Gluttony, which is usually understood to include drunkenness, (6) Wrath, or anger, and (7) sloth or laziness.

7 Wonders of the Ancient World. (1) Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt. (2) Hanging Gardens of Babylon. (3) Statue of Zeus at Olympia. (4) Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. (5) Mausoleum at Halicarnassus. (6) Lighthouse of Alexandria. (7) Colossus of Rhodes.