

1 Samuel 7.2-12

Stone of help

Christ Church Selly Park

Sunday 14 November 2021

Remembrance

Remembering

Who here has a good memory?

I have an appalling memory – I feel like Homer Simpson who once said, ‘Every time I learn something new it pushes something old out of my brain...!’

But who can remember what happened on 20 July 1969? Hint... ‘It’s one small step for (a) man... one giant leap for mankind...’

How about 1 August 2015? Anyone remember that day? Hint... *point at wedding ring...* It’s the day I got married to Jess.

Now, I know some of you here are *very* old... but I’m not sure any of you can remember 11 November 1918? Can someone tell me what happened then? Hint: the clue is the year.

How about 11 September 2001? Hint... better known as 9/11...

Finally, what about xxxxxxxx? I know lots of you were here for that day... it's the day this church building was opened.

You probably have special dates and times that you remember every now and then. Some of us find it easy to forget, so we need to find ways to help us remember. I use things like sticky notes and reminders on my phone... otherwise I forget *everything*.

Ebenezer

The events in our Bible reading took place about 3,000 years ago. God's people were under attack from their enemies who kept fighting them and killing lots of them. It was desperate – their enemies wanted to kill or enslave them. Not a great choice.

Eventually God's people decided to ask God for help. They weren't always good at that – too often they tried to fight in their own strength, or turn to other things for help instead of God. I'm sure we don't still do that today...

The Philistines drew near with a huge army to attack God's people (7). In desperation they prayed to God for help (8-9).

We'll come back in a moment to hear what happened.

Remember where we are in the story: God's people are being attacked by a huge army, and they cried out to God to help them.

And he helped them! God **thundered with loud thunder** (10) – and the Philistines were so terrified that they ran away, and God's people chased them all the way back to their own country.

Then Samuel did something clever. He knew that God's people would say thank-you to God for saving them that day – but he also knew that soon they would forget. So he took a stone *pick up large stone* – bigger than this one, and set it up as a memorial, to help God's people remember how God had helped them.

He gave the stone a name – he called it **Ebenezer** (12). It's a bit odd to give a stone a name... but does anyone know what the name **Ebenezer** means? The name means *stone of help*.

In other words, Samuel wanted the stone to remind God's people of how God had helped them, so they would remember to keep saying thank you to God.

A bit like that Ebenezer stone, every year on this Sunday we remember and thank God for those who gave their lives for our freedom.

Saying thank you

I asked you earlier how many of you have a good memory... I wonder, how many of you are good at saying thank you? My mum always used to make me write thank you cards after every birthday and Christmas. I'm ashamed to say I used to huff and puff and complain about having to do it.

But saying thank you is so important. When we say thank you to other people we help them know that we appreciate them. When we say thank you to God, it shows we recognise how important he is and that we can't do everything by ourselves.

Like God's people in our story, we need God's help – though not perhaps to defeat an army from another country:

- We need God's help to live his way and not give in to our every desire.
- We need God's help to fight against the bits inside us that make us angry, or greedy, or hurtful, or selfish.
- We need God's help to love and be kind to people we don't get on with, who can sometimes be nasty and hurt us.
- We need God's help to get through the difficult periods of life when things happen that upset or challenge us.

God helps us in these and so many ways, so it's good for us to say thank you to him.

But above all, we need to say thank you to God for Jesus. Jesus is God's way of saying, 'you are not alone'. Jesus is God's way of saying, 'I am always by your side'. Jesus is God's way of finding us when we're far from God and lost – if we turn to him, he brings us back to God where we belong, he brings us home.

Jesus himself told a beautiful short story about a sheep that gets lost. The good shepherd in the story searched high and low, across the hillside, until he found the sheep, picked it up, and carried it home. We are like the sheep, lost and afraid. Jesus is the shepherd, who comes to find us and bring us home.

I don't know how you're feeling this morning – but if you feel lost, Jesus is here, patient, ready to bring us home... if we want him to. If you want to know more, please speak to me afterwards.

I'm going to hand over back to Rachel and Anna now, who will talk to us about a way for all of us to say thank you to God for his help this morning.