

**Talk for Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021**  
**Exodus 18:13-27**  
**Rev Tracey Morris**

We've been looking at the events of Israel for a few weeks now. We have experienced suffering, struggle, liberation, and a good bit of moaning. We've seen miracles of epic proportions, and we've seen that God has been with Moses throughout the journey. Last Sunday, Roland talked about how Israel needed to step up and play their part in supporting Moses through a hard battle. And again, we saw the miracle of God at work through that. Today's passage takes us even further into this sense of playing a part. But this time we don't see the powerful God providing the impossible. We don't see grand gestures and drama. What we see is God providing some real-life down-to-earth practical guidance for Moses, through the wisdom of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law.

In his role as leader and judge for the people of Israel, Moses had found himself in an increasingly difficult position. Everyone was coming to him to sort out the problems. And when I say everyone, I'm not talking about a small group of people here. I'm not even talking about a church congregation. I'm talking about thousands of people. Every time something went wrong, they came to Moses. Big or small, serious or trifling, every issue came to Moses. Moses didn't just want to tell them the answer and leave it at that. He wanted to provide God's wisdom and teach them about the right way. He wanted to try and do the right thing. Jethro saw what was going on here, and he turned to Moses and said:

"What on earth is going on here? Why are you doing all this while everyone else is standing around watching you do the work. What you are doing is not good!"  
(paraphrase)

Jethro realised that Moses was burning out. His situation was unworkable, he'd taken on way too much, and it was not good.

Anyone recognise that feeling?

Now we don't know why Moses was in this position. It could be because Moses was a complete control freak and could not possibly let go of anything. Maybe he believed he was indispensable and if he was not the judge over things then everything would fall apart. Or maybe he just didn't know how else to do it and he had got himself into bad practice. What was clear was that this leadership was not working. One person doing everything was not workable and not healthy.

Thankfully Jethro was on hand with some advice for him:

No.1: Recruit some people. But not just anyone. These people were to be faithful, God-fearing, honest people who lived good lives. People Moses could trust.

No. 2: Train and prepare these people in what they need to do and how they need to appropriately respond to the issues that were raised.

No. 3: Place these people into roles of judge, in different courts for different situations. They would look after the small things, the minor problems, the gripes and the general day to day stuff.

No. 4: Moses would then deal with the big stuff. He would remain as the high court judge, the one in charge, and the people could bring the difficult cases to him.

No.5: This was by far the most important piece of advice Jethro gave to Moses, take all these things to God, continually. Every decision that was taken, from choosing the people, to training, to making the judgements, must be God's will.

Jethro wasn't telling Moses to remove his responsibility as their leader, and he definitely wasn't creating a free for all where people leapt in, took over, and made decisions for themselves because they thought they knew better. Moses was responsible for finding the appropriate people, training them in the right way to deal with things, and then putting them in the appropriate places. This was a carefully managed and God-led process, and it would have been an on-going process. But essentially, he would allow these people to get on with the day-to-day stuff. The outcome of this was that Moses would "be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied." In other words, there would be peace in the land. Moses and the people would live a life of health and wholeness, under God's guidance.

I have to admit, I get a lot of relief from this passage. As someone who will be taking on a role as a parish minister somewhere, in about 12 months' time, the fact that it is bad practice for the leader to do everything is very reassuring for me. So, it isn't all down to the vicar then!

I also think that, for our leaders at St Luke's, this is useful advice when considering who we are, how we work, who will lead us after the interregnum. But today's talk is not about how the Trustees will work out what leadership means for St Luke's. This morning is about what this says to each of us here, and how can we be a part of things together, as we face the future together, and we rebuild and restore together, and we battle together, and we celebrate together to be the body of Christ and become the people God made us to be.

What you receive from God today will depend on where you are at. The way I see it, there are 3 different roles at play here. There is Moses, the one who has taken everything on and needs to let go and delegate. There are the people who are standing around and watching Moses do everything, the ones who have the gifts to step in and take a role but right now are standing on the side-lines. And there are the rest of the people, who are part of the community, who have responsibilities in other things, who at that moment take all their problems to Moses because that's all they know.

The question is, what is God saying to you today about your role?

Do you need to let go? Are you trying to hold control, do everything yourself? Do you need to entrust others to take their part? Do you believe that you are indispensable and if you don't do it, everything will fall apart? Maybe God wants you to seek out those who He is calling to come and work with you, and maybe it's time to show these people what God needs them to do, and then let go and allow them to live out their call.

If that's not you then, is God calling you to step up? Do you need to play your part instead of standing around and watching? Maybe God is calling you to step forwards and offer yourself. Maybe somebody needs to entrust responsibility to you. Maybe you need to be willing to receive guidance and training, and then go and be released to use the gifts God has given you for that role.

Or maybe what God is asking of you is not to step up, He already has you called into something else. But maybe your role is to be one of the people who supports those who are in leadership. The only way the Israelites could live in peace was by everyone respecting the appointed leaders, working with them, following them and respecting their decisions. As long as these leaders had been chosen through God's will and trained with God's wisdom through Moses, then the people could trust them. Maybe God wants you to help the community to live in peace together by praying, and by listening to, trusting and supporting those who God has called to lead. You don't have to be a leader to play your part. Being a leader doesn't make you any more important than anyone else. In fact, without followers, leaders are pointless. We are all in this together, we all have gifts to give, and we all have a role, whether it is in the church or in the workplace or in Lodge Moor, or somewhere else entirely. In fact, all of us are followers. It's how we follow and who we follow that is the most important part.

I don't exclude myself from any of this. No matter how good a leader I can try to be, I know I have to face the fact that it isn't all about me. I am not indispensable. I constantly have to remind myself that the reason I do what I do is because of God, pure and simple. So, if I wasn't doing it, God would put someone else to do what I am doing. It wasn't all about Moses. Yes, Moses was a strong leader who, thousands of years later, we still look up to as a great example. But he wasn't great because he was clever enough to think up an amazing leadership style, or because of his ability to make brilliant decisions. It was because he followed God's instructions and constantly went back to God for every word and action. God made him the strong leader. God provided the instructions, including this wise counsel from his father-in-law.

We have to accept that this is not all about us. I make no apology for repeating what has been said several times at the front of church over the past few months - everything is about God. In fact, if every talk we give does not have this at the foundation, then we are doing something wrong. Nothing we do is worth doing without God. But, as we have seen in this passage, we can't do what God calls us to do without doing it together. We all have a part to play. Wherever you find yourself this morning, whether it's to let go, to step up, or to trust and follow, allow God to guide you in this. Think about it, listen, pray, talk about it with others. Work out what role God wants you to play in this life that he has given you.

We are all in this together, right?

We know God is with us in this right?

Then let's start now by declaring that we believe in God, we believe in Christ, we trust that God is powerful enough to do anything. With the next song Our Father Everlasting, let's worship God together, either quietly and passionately in the building, or singing loudly and passionately at home. Let's show God that we want him to guide us and show us where He wants us to be in all this. Let's show God that we know it's not all about us, that it is all about him.

Amen? Amen!