



Sunday 20 June 21  
Welcolme to Trinity season  
on Marah Moments!  
Reflection on 2 Chronicles 20:1-13

Have you noticed the theme in our present Sunday readings. It's shown in our Facebook page, it's identified on our website. It's written above.

'Trinity' refers to our relationship with God, who has revealed Hmself to us as One God in Three persons: the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; Christ Himself, the Son of God and God the Holy Spirit who lives with us in life, bringing us to the Father through the Son. The One God is a Trinity and we are His Trinitarian people.

We do not live life alone. He knew our forefathers. He knew us even before all things were made. He is the eternal God who will be with us after we die, for His love for us endures for ever. He will not let us perish in death. He will take us into His future. The Lord our God has both brought us into His present, and into His presence. Our life has its meaning in Him. This is the context of our life.

We first met the word 'Marah', when our ancient ancestors in faith, the Exodus Israelies, deeply thirsting after a three day trek in the desert came to water and found it was Marah - bitter. The sweet waters of hope were bitter disappointment. For them and for us all, human life, Jesus included, suffers Marah moments. On the cross, Jesus who had always been One in being and love with His Father, found Himself cut off from His Father's love, crying out: My God, my God, why have You forsaken me. The sins of our lives piled a mountain of Marah moments upon Him as He drank the cup of utter bitterness that was rightly ours to drink.

Marah moments. They come in different ways. Some from the doings of those who hate us. Some from life in a broken world. Some as the consequences of our own actions. And of course these ways can come together. As happened to Jehosaphat. He was known as a good king, the meature of his goodness being that he kept God's ways. The Bible tells us that he did not go after other gods but sought the God of his [ancestral] father King David, and followed God's commands rather than the practices of Israel. [Israel here is the nation of the 10 tribes which broke away from the original 12, and from its beginning worshipped false gods. Jehosaphat ruled Judah, the 2 tribes that Israel left behind.]

But Jehosaphat, perhaps with the good hope intention of bringing Israel and Judah back together made alliance with Ahab the King of Israel, firstly by

marriage and secondly for war. A war that turned out very bad for Ahab, for he was killed in the fighting and was not so good for Jehoshaphat. Unlike Ahab, he returned safely home to his palace in his capital city. Think how that must have been a pleasure in his heart. But on his way he was greeted by a spokesman of God, who said to him. "Should you help the wicked and love or make alliance with those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is upon you." How suddenly can the sweetness of safety be most bitterly disturbed. Yet he was also told, "There is however some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles, [the religious symbols and worship signs of a false god] and have set your heart on seeking God."

A question. When life drops you in a Marah moment what's your usual response? What did Jehoshaphat do next. Some like Ahab would have blamed the messenger for the message, and ill-treated God's spokesman, but Jehoshaphat established godly justice in Judah, appointing judges and civil rulers who would serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord, for in the Lord there is no injustice or partiality or bribery. This week the Metropolitan Police was hit by a Marah Moment as being revealed to be institutionally corrupt. How is its boss responding?

So we come to the Marah moment when Jehoshaphat meets the consequences of his sin for allying with Ahab. A vast army is coming to attack him. Let me ask again when life drops you in a Marah moment what's your usual response? If you were Jehoshaphat would you have focused on calling up your army, encouraging your troops, and appealing to your neighbours, Israel we helped you, will you help us? Would your primary, most important and most urgent action be to resolve to enquire of the Lord, to call a fast and assemble a prayer meeting, to which God's people would come from every town to seek the Lord?

Jehoshaphat's actions are a model for our actions and his prayer a model for our prayer. Except for the reference to forgiveness it anticipates the Lord's prayer. Its focus is the sovereign and almighty God. His power and might no-one can withstand. His will be done. It's an appeal to God's relationship with His people, seen in all He has done for them, in calling Abraham, in giving the land, in the building of a temple, as a token of God's presence with them. Keep His kingdom safe.

It's a re-affirmation of their covenant relationship. He is their God, they are utterly dependent on Him. He promises that when His people cry out in their distress, He will hear them and save them. Ask, seek, knock, they trusted God as the one who provides for us, for he who asks will be answered, he who seeks will find, and for he who knocks the door will be opened.

It's a trust in Him as the judge of what is right and wrong. He banned His people in the Exodus attacking these nations. Now how do they repay God? By attacking His people. May the Lord be their judge. And then the last simple appeal. Not asking God to strengthen their arms, nor to be with them in the battle but confessing we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.

And what happened? God answers him. Do not be afraid, or discouraged. What a word to us in our Marah days. The battle is not yours but God's. That's the truth revealed, summarised, confirmed on the cross. You will not have to fight this battle. But this is what you are to do: take up your positions, stand firm and witness the deliverance the Lord will give you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. Face your fear in the knowledge that the Lord will be with you.

And then they praised the Lord. And the army was sent forth not with an encouraging address but in praise, singing to the Lord in the splendour of His holiness: Give thanks to the Lord for His love endures forever.

And the Lord did as He promised. He won the battle. And Judah's army assembled in a valley of spoils where they praised the Lord, and they called that Valley, Beracah which means blessed and from that valley they returned to Jerusalem continued their rejoicing in the temple of the Lord.

He will deliver this church. As we stand firm in Him, He will grow us in strength of faith, in depth of love, in quality of gifts, in the fruit of mission. What days those must have been for Jehoshaphat and his people. From Marah bitterness to Beracah blessing. As they were for them so they will be for this church.

Only seek the Lord. Stand firm. Do not be afraid. Praise the Lord always.

As Paul wrote to the Philippians: Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition, present your requests to God. And the peace of God – which is His Shalom healing restoring presence, which passes all ordinary natural understanding will guard your hearts and minds and therefore your lives in Christ Jesus.

Amen.