**Talk – 25th October 2020 Deuteronomy 34 1-12**

Well – here we are at the final reading of the God of our Story season. We have been following this theme throughout the period of Trinity which began in the middle of June. What a long time ago that seems! It began, all those weeks ago, with God making Abraham and Sarah what seemed an impossible promise – that even though she was old, she would have a son! What a start to the story. And throughout the past four months we have learnt so much about:

* Sarah and Abraham
* Isaac and Rebekah
* Esau and Jacob and their rivalry and then reconciliation
* The well known story of Joseph

And

* Moses - as a tiny baby being hidden in the rushes from the wrath of the Egyptian King.
* Moses - meeting with God at the burning bush and given the task of leading the Israelites out of Egypt; of his establishing the festival of the Passover; being given the ten commandments; when the Israelites set up false idols, successfully pleading with God to forgive and save these people and then –
* Moses beseeching God to reassure him that he had done the right thing bringing them out of slavery to find the promised land. And God did so and showed himself to Moses – although not his face.

And now here we are today at the end of Moses’ story.

The forty years of wandering are about to be over and the people of Israel are poised to enter the Promised Land. God had forbidden Moses to lead the people into this new land, but He takes him to a hilltop and shows him the land that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants back in Genesis. The Promised Land, stretching from Dan in the north, to the sea in the west, to Zoar in the south - and in verse 4, God affirms that this is the land that He had sworn to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses, whom we are assured has unimpaired sight and is still a vigorous man despite being 120 (!), has been obedient and has had faith for so long that he must have been profoundly thankful to have his hopes and convictions confirmed by what he saw.

Then, God abruptly reminds Moses that he can only look – he will not live to see his people occupy this sweep of land. And Moses dies. Having climbed to a vantage point on Mt. Pisgah, he views the land of promise but he never enters it. And the Israelites never see him again, and the circumstances of his death and burial remain shrouded in mystery. We are told that no-one knew where Moses was buried – he just disappeared. The Israelites mourned him for 30 days – far longer than the traditional period of 7 days, which was an indication of their love, gratitude and respect for Moses.

Once the period of mourning was over the people resumed their normal lives with Joshua as their leader - Joshua was already an established authority among the Israelites, who knew him to be “full of the spirit of wisdom.” Wisdom that came from God.

He had served as an assistant to Moses and we are told that it wasn’t the people who chose him as the successor, it was God - who had commanded Moses to lay his hand on him and commission him for the task. And because they knew that Joshua had been chosen by God through Moses, the Israelites obeyed him.

The final paragraph tells us that Moses was the greatest prophet, ‘unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform’ – which is why Moses is mentioned more often than any other prophet in the NT and why the NT writers often compare Jesus' words and deeds with Moses' to help explain Jesus' mission.

So what do we draw from our weeks of following the God of our Story? Apart from the fact that I, for one, have learnt so much about the Old Testament, I personally found the following insights (and no doubt you all will have others):

Firstly, this narrative illustrates that we have to trust in God and accept that we cannot always know what is best for us but that He does! Abraham being prepared to sacrifice his beloved son had us wondering about a God who is supposed to be the God of love, not a God who demands the ultimate sacrifice of a parent. But as Andrew commented, although Abraham was faced with an impossible moral choice – to either deny God’s justice and sovereignty or to sacrifice his only son - God acted as He always will and just when we think we face an impossible dilemma, He provides a way ahead.

Secondly, it shows us that God has the LONG view. But sometimes that long view comes about because of us! Humankind has the gift of free will and we often choose the wrong path! His patience with us is boundless and he is prepared to wait for us.

Equally, we have to be patient and accept that God might want *us* to wait for *Him*! But we must never think that God has forsaken us for we cannot know what he has in store for us.

Thirdly, the God of our Story endlessly gives us another chance. He accepts our frailty and wants us have another try at whatever He has planned for us. Always, the God of our Story is a compassionate God who wants reconciliation and restoration such as when Jacob feared Esau taking revenge, yet they were able to put the past behind them and work together.

Fourthly, we should recognise that our gifts and strengths come from God. God gives us our gifts and in return we serve Him and humankind - but we may not always see the results. Just as Moses spent 40 long years leading his people out of Egypt yet was not able to enter the Promised Land, so we must accept that we have work to do in the present which may not show results until long after we are gone.

Finally, we must recognise that it is God who empowers us and enables us to be the people we are. Without him we can do very little for we shall fall at every hurdle – and just as in the old party game of trust where in pairs one has to fall backwards into the arms of the other, we have to trust God, allow ourselves to fall and know that He will catch us. And that’s not always easy!