

I have a short video saved on my computer that seems appropriate this weekend in the United States, in Maine, and in Christ Church Kennebunk. It begins with a scene in a vast desert. A lone figure is standing holding a staff looking into the distance. The word "Exodus" appears on the screen over the image. Now fade to a large group of desert people with camels donkeys, and goats. All are pointing and gesturing. A man pushes through the crowd and finally approaches the lone figure; whom we have to guess is Moses, who says, "We're lost." Finally we understand that this is a commercial for Garmin, an Israeli manufacturer of GPSS's.

We don't have the desert, the camels or the goats, but it seems like a good image for us today. It is just that our situation today is not funny. For some of us it is frightening, for some confusing, for some a challenge.

Our scripture lesson this morning offers comfort and direction. We can often find comfort in reading the Bible Prophets like Jeremiah. Prophets had two principal tasks in speaking for God. One was to look back. They reminded us what God had done and commanded us to do. The other was to look ahead, predicting the future and passing on God's directions.

In this morning's reading, we hear one prophet comment on another. Hananiah, speaking for God during the time in which Jerusalem was in captivity to Babylon, predicted they would be free in two years and everything and everyone taken into captivity would be returned. Jeremiah says he hopes that is what God is saying and reminds Judah that prophets had predicted many things in the past, war, famine, and pestilence against other nations. He goes on saying "As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet." The prophesy may sound good, but let's see how it works out.

This reminder, that trusting in God requires the patience to wait and see how and when God is going to respond to our prayers and requires the trust to endure the waiting.

Many of us are looking for immediate answers to our questions and solutions to our worries. We cannot predict God's timetable any more than the people of Judah could in Jeremiah's time.

God saved the people of Israel from famine by arranging relief in Egypt, but it took 400 years of slavery and oppression before they could return to the Promised Land. In the meantime, they needed to grow in faith to be strong enough to be successful when they got there. They also had to learn what was expected of the people of God.

In our Gospel lesson from Matthew we hear the word “Welcome” repeated over and over. Remember, Jesus did not say this in English. The author of The Gospel did not write it in English. The word found in the best early fragments of the text means “welcome in terms of hospitality.” Not just a greeting, but an opening of who we are and what we have.

We saw in the exercise we did last week that our ministry to immigrants and refugees has resonated in the body of our congregation. To many of us, it has become more than collecting furniture, bedding and clothing. It has meant opening our lives to strangers, opening our families to people who are strangers in a strange land.

This ministry also puts us swimming against the tide in a culture of growing xenophobia. Anti-immigrant laws and policies, fear of outsiders, lack of any coherent immigration policy in the country put all of us outside the norm. We who seek the recognition and the welcoming of the righteous will not find it from the world’s culture. Those who put themselves out for the good of others quickly realize that they themselves are the big winner. We go closer to our God and to our neighbors. When we hear the response to our sacrifice as a “Thank You!” or “You’re Welcome!” takes on a new meaning; When we offer that welcome it is an offer to Jesus through us, and through Jesus to God. Putting ourselves in that line puts us in the company we want to be keeping. Amen