

Coach House Church **BEACONS**

DONT PRESUME

17TH SEPTEMBER 2020

I once set off on a journey to sunny Scarborough. I rather presumed that if I followed the signs that I would arrive there without too much of a problem. However, this did not take into account the two small children who caused some distraction at key moments: those key moments being when I should have noticed the huge motorway sign directing me along another road to my intended destination. The result of not planning ahead and presuming more than I knew about the route was a long detour and an exasperated husband who was waiting for us to arrive much earlier than we did.

Have you ever been in the position of presuming something would happen but to be disappointed or surprised when it didn't go to plan? It may be as simple as expecting a dry sunny day that will dry all those heavy cotton items, the bedding and towels – to realise that the forecaster, through no particular fault of their own, also made a presumption which did not include a series of heavy downpours. Remember the time when we are told that there was no chance of a storm! That was the year that Sevenoaks became one oak.

In the Old Testament, there is the very strange story of Ehud and King Eglon where some dangerous presumptions were made. The Israelites, in Judges chapter 3, had forgotten about God yet again, choosing to worship other gods and prefer to make their own choices against God's directions. So, God gave King Eglon of Moab, one of their enemies, power over Israel. The King of Moab attacked Israel and took over the City of Palms, usually known as Jericho. His rule over them lasted 18 years which eventually brought the Israelites to their senses and they cried out to God to rescue them.

Ehud, from the tribe of Benjamin was chosen as the deliverer and he set about visiting the King of Moab to take a tribute, a present, an offering. Sometimes you

might show respect or gratitude for someone you visit with a gift, just as a bouquet is given to the queen when she is on a royal tour. Maybe King Eglon was flattered, maybe he was confident in his own position and therefore wasn't overly concerned about Ehud's visit. The truth was that security was not stringent. This is where the presumption comes in to play – Ehud was left handed, and as such would have kept his sword on his right. No-one checked his right side and the sword which was hidden in plain sight was not discovered. The result was that Ehud, the judge, was able to approach the King of Moab alone, and plunged the sword into his belly which is described as so big it covered the handle so that Ehud left it in place, exiting the scene before anyone realised.

Never presume, always check first. This is what the security guards must have been thinking after that.

In another event, in Joshua chapter 9, Joshua had successfully led the Israelites to conquer Jericho, then the city of Ai. They were on the up. However, Proverbs does say Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

(Proverbs 16:18, NIV) and that was what happened next. The surrounding kingdoms decided to wage war against Joshua and Israel. In Joshua chapter 9 it says:

3 However, when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, 4 they resorted to a ruse: They went as a delegation whose donkeys were loaded[a] with worn-out sacks and old wineskins, cracked and mended. 5 They put worn and patched sandals on their feet and wore old clothes. All the bread of their food supply was dry and moldy. 6 Then they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and the Israelites, "We have come from a distant country; make a treaty with us."

The Gibeonites asked for a treaty to be made with Israel, saying they had heard great things about the Lord their God. Joshua presumed they were telling the truth, looked at the evidence before him and most marked of all, it says in verse 14 that Joshua and Israel 'did not enquire of the Lord.' They were then bound by an oath, by their word and an agreement, that they would be allies and that meant protection for the Gibeonites. When Joshua found out that they were close neighbours he realised that he could not go back on his agreement with them. He also knew that God's original instruction, given to Moses , to take over the whole land for Israel, was also compromised. So, in a bid to sort the situation the Gibeonites became woodcutters and water carriers, servants to Israel.

How easy it is to look at the superficial evidence and not understand the real situation. 1 Samuel 16:7 tell us how we automatically look at the outward appearance but that it is God who sees the heart, the real person beneath. In many instances in the bible particular people are overlooked. The culture of the day treated people differently depending on their background, their age, their social standing, their gender. There was an expectation that those of higher social standing, the religious leaders and rulers would automatically enter heaven, as they often gave the impression of righteousness. However, when you look at how Jesus treated the ordinary people you realise how radical his teachings were in that day. He took time to speak to those who were disregarded by society. He went further and showed compassion and understanding for their difficulties. Matthew chapter 5 Jesus talks to the crowd gathering on the hillside and tells them how blessed, how important to him they are, how well they will be rewarded in heaven: the poor in spirit, those persecuted for their belief in Jesus, those who are broken hearted and in mourning, those who yearn to follow God' laws and live righteous lives with pure hearts. Jesus went further stating in verse 20, that the example of the religious leaders is not to be followed as their type of righteousness would not get them to heaven.

How many times did Jesus talk to the beggar by the side of the road, to the disgraced woman who came to collect water so she wouldn't bump into her neighbours, to the unclean lepers who lived outside the city walls? It wasn't that he was presuming that the well-to-do, the rich and influential couldn't change their ways, just that it was more difficult for them to see their need of Jesus. The apostle Paul, began as an influential Pharisee, well-educated and feared for his commitment to persecuting Christians. Yet, Jesus spoke directly to him in a vision, in a blinding light on the road to Damascus, and he responded by a 180 degree turn around in his life, his focus, his purpose and his belief system.

John 3:16 states

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God did not make a superficial choice of who could enter heaven, demanding a particular appearance, education, social status. He made the invitation for everyone who believes in Jesus. Jesus paid the price for sin by being the perfect and acceptable sacrifice, once for all time, so that God would look at us, not as hopeless cases, full of flaws and mistakes but through His son Jesus, perfect and untainted by sin.

We don't presume we are good enough to meet God's standards. We accept who we are and ask for forgiveness for our imperfections, faults and wrongs, our deliberate or misguided choices. But then we accept the free gift of God to turn and make the right choice and with the support of his Holy Spirit to live a life that is more acceptable to God's laws.

God doesn't presume, he knows all about us as it says in Psalm 139:

***You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.***

***2 You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.***

***3 You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.***

***4 Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.***

Don't presume that you can do everything in your own strength, that you can tackle everything alone. Proverbs 3 is a much stated series of verses but provides sound advice.

***Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;***

***6 in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.[a]***

***7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.***

***8 This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.***

Amen



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