

SERMON ~ BIBLE READING: 2 KINGS 23:1-23

At the start of this series we learnt something about how Hezekiah reformed the temple's worship and called people back to serving God. In some ways it was a bit of a half-hearted reform, although Hezekiah's sincerity was real. Manasseh's return to idolatry had washed much of Hezekiah's work away – we heard about this in our potted history. But now with Josiah we encounter a king who was completely committed to a true turnaround and a total obliteration of pagan worship. No compromises for Josiah! Today I want to focus on three factors that were central to all that Josiah did. They are also central to his ability to get the people to remember God.

1. At the heart of all that Josiah did lies the discovery of the Book of the Covenant we read about earlier – this was probably a scroll of Deuteronomy which spells out in detail what the Lord required of his people. This gave Josiah both impetus and guidance. He made sure the people heard God's Word and committed themselves to obeying it. He organised teaching.

And at the heart of all that we do is the Christian Bible of which the Book of the Covenant is part. We hear and read what the Lord requires of us in the 21st Century and this gives us the impetus to get on with his work and the guidance to keep us on track and open up new avenues. We make sure that we disciples of today hear God's Word – both minister and congregation hear the Bible read and the sermon preached in the Sunday service. The Bible reading and sermon on Sunday are so important. But we are not just called to be hearers of the Word but doers also; so every Sunday we commit ourselves to obeying God's Word, doing what he tells us.

And we organise teaching. We do that through our Bible Study Groups where a mutual teaching and learning goes on. Every one of us should be attached to one of these groups – details are in the sheets. Wouldn't it be great if we had so many people wanting to join these groups that we had to start new ones!

2. Josiah was clearly a good organiser and got his people, especially the leaders, working together. They were clear about what their roles were, and focused on the task. The gift of administration should never be despised – very little actually gets done, especially of long-term value, without it!

And so today I want to affirm all those who are involved in administration in the North Kirk. In addition to all the leaders and treasurers of Church groups, teams and committees, I affirm Irene Burnett, our Session clerk, Alice Symington, chair to the Congregational Board, Jean Lord, clerk to the Congregational Board, Irene Young, the Team Leaders convener, Anne Pearson, our Finance Team leader, Derek Thorpe, our new treasurer and Susan Conlan, our church secretary. So join me in thanking them all from the bottom of our hearts for all the essential and invaluable administrative work they do in the North Kirk Family and on our behalf.

3. He had a clear goal: the total transformation of worship in his kingdom. This included the destruction of the pagan practices and the re-establishment of services of remembrance according to the Book of the Covenant. We are told that there had never been such a celebration of the Passover, that meal and festival to recall God's rescue operation when he saved them from slavery in Egypt and led them to the promised land.

And every time we gather at the family table to share the bread and wine, we should be telling each other that there has never such a celebration of Communion, that meal – and when the Church was beginning it was a real meal – to recall God's new rescue operation when he saved us from sin and death and leads us to the promised land of the Kingdom, heaven itself.

And surely the transformation of our worship what we all long for – it's got nothing to do with what we sing but everything to do with the way we sing it. It's about transformed people singing and praising from transformed hearts and in a transformed way. Yes, Lord, yes.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

‘At times when you remember God, increase your prayers, so that when you forget him, the Lord may remind you.’ (Mark the Ascetic)

‘Christians are those who remember the story of Jesus within the community of the church, in and for their own time and in their own lives.’ (Nicola Slee)

‘When remembrance of God lives in the heart and there maintains the fear of him, then all goes well; but when this remembrance grows weak or is kept only in the head, then all goes astray.’ (Theophan the Recluse)