

All Saints Talk for Sunday 16th July 2023

Sermon Title: 'Raising the next generation'

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The 12th in our series 'Journey to the Promised Land'

Reading: *Deuteronomy 31:1-9*

This morning, I'm going to talk about 'raising the next generation'. And I'm really going to focus on the Deuteronomy 31:1-9 passage. So if you want to reference it, please do look it up and have it open.

I must confess, I was sitting here thinking about the talk I'm going to do, and thinking this is all the wrong way round, because I'm speaking to a congregation of people who have 'raised' me. So amongst you are people who have been my teachers, you've raised me since I was really young. People who have known me since I was a child and a youth, people who have given me advice about how to preach a sermon. But obviously, if I get it wrong, it's not their fault! But, also a church that has prayed for the institutions that have raised me. I went to WASPS, and I know you were a praying congregation. I remember coming here when I was four, and coming to the Christmas services in this church. And so I'm sorry that it's the wrong way round, but I will share my thoughts. And hopefully, there'll be useful reflections and then you can keep teaching me! But thank you for raising me. I guess that is the first point.

So the opening question is, when are you investing in? So when you think about the future, when do you think about? Do you think about lunch? And whether you've got enough potatoes? And what time you need to put on the meat? Do you think about next week? And whether you've got everything ready? Do you think about maybe the holidays or times you might be going away in the next few months and whether everything's in order? Do you think about a bit longer in the future? Maybe you have something you are worrying about? Because life suddenly feels uncertain, whether it's because of health or relationships. I had a multiple sclerosis diagnosis a few years ago, and suddenly I think gosh, the future what does that mean? But actually, today is about talking about a longer term future. What is the future? What is our legacy beyond when we are here, but also beyond when we are here on Earth. And that's

not about us leaving a legacy with plaques on the wall, or big statues. You know, Bath is full of examples of people who are remembered in name from generations ago. You know, we have big statues to people from long ago, we have plaques. But actually, this is about being a blessing beyond our time on Earth. This is about leaving a blessing through the future generations, that our impact will last even when we are in heaven with God. And so that is what we're focusing on today.

So first of all, we're going to think about who raised you, who are you the future generation of? Then we will think about what can we learn from Moses and his kind of handing over to the next generation; his handing over to Joshua. Then we will think about who has raised us not as individuals, but as a church? And then who are we raising? So the first thing we're going to think about is who raised you who raised us as individuals. So I have many, many examples in my life and actually, I'm looking at some of them. But I will leave them aside for now. Here's a photo of WASPS. That is there because obviously being at school has been a big part of who I am. I went to WASPS and then to King Edwards, and that's the legacy in me. But there have also been individuals along the way. Here's a photo of someone called Tee. She's actually only a couple of years older than me, but she was the generation above me when I was a student. So when I went to university, I was in that place of, should I continue my walk with God, or should I not? It's one of those first moments where you're stepping out independently. And she raised me as kind of a next generation of students. And she did that by just coming alongside me. She kind of adopted me, she showed me where things happen, she took me to the library for the first time, she would come and sit and have coffee with me in my room again and again. And she is someone who really raised me not through a kind of dramatic intervention, but by spending hours and hours of time just being with me when I needed someone to walk beside me. The other example that came to mind when I was thinking is a person called Lesley Corp, and I don't know if any of you knew her. She died about 10 years ago. She was in her 90s when she died and she'd been in Bridgeman Care Home for 10 years before she died. And I knew her, she was a close friend of my mum's, from when I was a child, but actually, it's when she was in her care home that I think she had the most influence on me. We used to go and visit her with my mum regularly. And when I was back in Bath from university or South Sudan, I would pop along with my mum and say, hello to her and greet her. And she would always tell me off basically. She was a nurse, she would have been like a matron in the hospitals,

she had grown up as a strong and powerful woman. And she would tell me off for not praying enough, for not resting enough, for getting too busy. And now every time I'm too busy, I kind of almost hear her voice in my head, and telling me to take a Sabbath and to take time with God. So she was a massive influence on my life. So just for two minutes, I'd love you to turn to the person next to you or behind you and tell them who was one person who you think raised you, who was a big influence in your walk with God. And I'm sure actually, there's probably many, many people; you have a rich treasure chest of people who have raised you over time. And I guess, preparing for this has just reminded me to thank God for them and actually to contact some of them who I have maybe fallen out of touch with. But I think it is precious to thank God for those people. And it made me think of those people almost like a family tree. You know, we often do those family trees about people who we're actually related to, but in God's family, we have a very different family tree somehow in a much more organic and chaotic way. We are connected to so many different people through these kinds of generations and the people that have raised us.

So now we'll move on to Moses. What can we learn from Moses about raising the next generation. I'm looking at that Deuteronomy 31 passage and thinking about a few things that we can take from Moses for example. The first thing for me is that Moses was not self centered. He was not self focused. But he was really focused on a bigger picture, and raising the next generation. He was wanting to be a blessing way beyond his own lifetime and willing to accept that. There is this Greek proverb that says, 'society thrives when people plant trees that they will not sit under'. I'm sure you've all heard it, and it feels quite twee. But actually, there's a cost in that. I mean, the first thing that struck me about Moses and Joshua: Moses handing over to Joshua, because Joshua is not his son, which sounds really obvious as it's very clear from kind of Numbers and Deuteronomy that he's not his son. It's not his name that will be continued. It's part of God's plan very clearly that Joshua would take over the baton from him. But it's not his name, it's not his son that Moses is investing in. But also that Moses is willing to hand over. In that passage in Deuteronomy 31 it says, I am no longer able to lead you. Moses is saying this: 'I know now it's time to hand over. I've raised you, Joshua, and now is the moment'. But that is no easy thing to hand over to the next generation. If we think about Moses' life, he starts with that dramatic story and he's left in the river and he's taken to the royal palace, and all the kind of wealth and grandeur of a royal upbringing. But it is as if even from that

moment, he is planning. His life has been shaped to take his people from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. It would be very easy to think that right from that moment that is his mission. And it is his mission, that he's been given the access to the courts of Pharaoh and he needed that. He needed to know the ways to speak, he needed to have access to those palaces in order to take people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. And then he has his time in the wilderness. He has his time in his own personal wilderness, not the kind of Israel wilderness time in Midian. And that again is maybe preparation for him taking his people to the promised land. Because he's from royal palaces, he has that access, he has the kind of social knowledge to work in those spaces and to lead. But then he also has this experience of hardship. He's a shepherd, he knows what it is to live in tough conditions. And he's going to have to do that when he leads his people out of Egypt, as Claire Parr spoke about in her talk here. Even if they had gone straight to the promised land and they hadn't had the 40 years in the wilderness they'd have still had to cross the wilderness and so that kind of Shepherd training was also about preparing for the promised land. And then of course, the parting of the Red Sea and that kind of movement out of Egypt: he knew where he was going to the promised land. But of course, you get to this final stage at 120 years old and he knows his time of leadership is over, he is not going to make it to the Promised Land, even though his whole life has been about that. And that willingness to hand over is not easy. But somehow he manages it because of God's strength and his faith in God and His trust that God knows what he's doing. And we see this in other places in the bible. So in Hebrews, when you get that big Hall of Fame of some of the great heroes of faith through the Bible, and in there it says, 'they died in faith, not having received things promised'. So even some of the great heroes of faith die and they've moved towards the promised land, but they don't get there. And that is no easy thing to accept. But it is that willingness to accept the blessing for the next generation. It's a very, very selfless thing. The other thing we learned from Moses is that he really had a big story in mind. He was able to hand over because it wasn't ever his story. It was a much, much bigger story. So if we look at verse six, in Deuteronomy 31, he speaks to the people of Israel and says, 'Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or terrified, because of them, for the Lord, your God goes with you, He will never leave you nor forsake you'. Moses is stepping back, but God is going with them. And Moses knows this is God's story, not just his story. He is part of it, but him not getting to the Promised Land is not the key. It's the fact that the Israelites will get there. Then he goes on and says to Joshua, 'Be strong and

courageous for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance'. So there's a slight difference in those verses he is using to 'be strong' and 'be courageous'. And those words will come back in Joshua's use later on, and his commission as he steps forward into the promised land. But in the words that Moses speaks to Joshua, he evokes these ideas of the ancestors, he is saying, you are part of a much, much longer story. And of course, that story is a story of that whole Old Testament so far. It's a story of Moses, of God saying, 'you will leave slavery in Egypt, and you will go through the wilderness to the promised land'. But the Promised Land is a story that goes right back to the beginning; to the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden was about walking with God, where people and God could walk together freely and peacefully. And the Promised Land is again, a promise of a land where God and His people can be together, and they can walk freely, and be with their God in a land that's full of milk and honey. And so that promise continues, it's a long promise, and it will continue further.

There are a few other tips that we get from Moses. Moses asked God's about who he should kind of raise this next generation, I think sometimes it's hard for us to think what should we do? Who should we support? And Moses asked God. I think that's fine for us to say, God, who should we be investing time in what is the next generation, who are the people that we should be praying for and seeking to walk alongside? Moses shows us that it was a slow nurturing process. Joshua was son of Nun who had been Moses aide since youth. Joshua, since he was young, had walked alongside Moses. They'd been together, they'd seen each other working. Joshua was often there with Moses, when he went into the tent to meet God. He saw him chatting with God. He knew that as an example. There was a church leader I once knew who would often bring people to live in his house or spend a lot of time in his house just to see how Christian life could be done. What was it to kind of spend time in a Christian environment, to realise that it could be you. You could casually ask 'how is your walk with Jesus going?' You could pray a lot during the day, but people see and learn through examples. And Moses was also an example to Joshua for good and bad. Joshua really saw the good things Moses did, but he also saw the big mistakes he made. He saw Moses' lack of faith in going into the promised land. And of course, Joshua must have learned from that, the way that God responded as it delayed the promise and access to the promised land. And I think as we raised the

next generation, it's not just about being perfect. It's not about getting everything always right. We are an example to them. They watch us all the time, young people, our colleagues alongside us, our peers, we are an example, and we don't always get things right. But that's okay as long as we talk about those mistakes and are willing to share them with the next generation.

Another few key points: Moses really reminded Joshua of his call, he reminded him that God had appointed him and anointed him and he would go out in God's name. Moses reminded him of the continuity of God, but the Lord God Himself would cross ahead of him, that he didn't need to fear because Moses was stepping back, but he could be confident that God would be with him and leading him and very present with him. And that God was his advanced guard. Joshua had been amongst Moses' spies that had gone ahead to look at the promised land those 40 years before, but now God had gone ahead and he looked at the land and knew Joshua could know with confidence that it was the right time to go out and go ahead; that even if Moses would not be going with him, that God very much would. And at the centre it was God's story and God was still present, is very key to the kind of vision Moses had for this kind of future leadership.

So then, the next question is, who raised us as a church and I thought it was quite interesting to think not just of ourselves as individuals, and how we have been influenced by different people through our lives, but how we got here as a church congregation. And there's different bits of history and I'm no expert in any of them, but I've tried to think a little bit about what is our story. And of course, it starts right back with Moses, a very long history, it starts right back with the promise, even before that with the Garden of Eden, with the promise that we can walk with God. And even when we get things wrong, we can walk with God again, that there is a way back, when a lot of the story of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and then Moses, and then Joshua, is getting to a land where they can again be with God, that it's a land where God is gonna dwell and be with them. But of course, that is not the end of the story. Because really, for us to walk with God everywhere, we needed the relationship to be rebuilt, we need it to be able to freely walk with God again, everywhere. And the only way for that to happen was for the things we had got wrong to be fully forgiven. And so of course our story starts with the cross. And our history starts with the chorus of God saying, I will bring you back together, I will bring

you back together with me through the death of my Son on the cross. And that meant the Promised Land was no longer a geographic pocket on Earth, but was the whole earth. Once we have learnt that we can walk with him again and have faith with him again. And so from there, from that kind of confidence in the cross, and the whole world being the potentially the new promised land, through faith, Jesus sent people out, He sent His disciples out to tell the whole world of this story. Then a few weeks ago, we heard from Tony, that reminds us of Pentecost, that actually all of us can trace our story of faith somehow back to Pentecost. Now I can probably think of the people that have taught me about Jesus and they would have their own stories of who's taught them. But actually, if we went really far back, maybe sixty, seventy generations, we would get to Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit came and filled the church with power. Then we have the missionaries who come to England in the late five hundreds, people bringing the good news about Jesus to the English and the British Isles. And before that, maybe we even have the Romans. There's some evidence now of Roman Christian house churches even before that, but the missionaries came then. Then we have the coming of the good news to bath. You know, the abbey says there's been worshipping at the abbey for the last 1200 years. So a really long heritage, and I do wonder, do you think then people were praying for us in 1000 years time? I wonder if we should be praying for people in 1000 years time. It's an incredibly long period of time, but we are their legacy. We are somehow their inheritance that the church would be here. Then we take it forward to Weston and to this church. Tom has done some amazing work, I must admit. I've mined Tom's work on the All Saints website and so I am hopefully going to get right what I'm about to say. But as I understand it we know there was a church presence here in 1156. But there was probably an older church presence and an older Christian community, and the influence of Bath Abbey would have already been felt in these areas. And then over that 900 year period there has been a lot of history and a lot of struggles for the church. And one that I've been thinking about a lot was about 200 years ago, when actually Bath and the UK was going through a really turbulent time. And it's faith, there had been a civil war, which has seen kind of Catholics and Protestants and seemingly a kind of Protestant victory. But really, what it meant was a war between the church had really kind of dented many people's faith, because it's as much as the Anglican Church or the Protestant seem to win, what it told people is that religion was a dangerous thing. And that was then hard for people to continue in faith, and with the rise of all these different influences you had slavery going on. And

with that, the wealth of slavery, and of course, Bath was full of the wealth from those kind of days of Empire. In the days of slavery, you have a city built on the kind of luxury and lavish living that can come from the money of Empire. And so it was known as this lavish and alcohol ridden and gambling ridden and party ridden kind of place. John Wesley was in Bristol in the 1700s and he described Bath as humbug, folly and vanity. He saw it as just a kind of big social splurge. But people were aware and the church was aware, and the church prevailed because people invested in keeping Jesus' message alive, despite society wanting to turn away, especially in the richest parts of society. And you see that in the work of John Wesley in the 1700s. But in this church, you see it in the work of John Bond, which Tom has highlighted in his work on the website. So in 1826, John Bond became the vicar here, he was a young man. And at the time, Weston was not the most luxurious place to live. It was beyond the elite of the centre, but it was a growing space with more and more people living here. The population went from about 1000 to 3000. And in many ways, even for people who were serving the city, there was a flurry of breweries that grew up, because people needed to brew beer to take to the people in the centre. This was a poor area, poor in spirit, but also maybe poor in money. But next to the kind of lavishness of the centre of Bath and some pockets of wealth in these areas, with some of the bigger houses. But in that space, you had a vicar who came, and he was young, and he was wealthy. But he was willing to invest in this parish, that wasn't the richest parish. As a wealthy man, he maybe could have got a better parish in a better place. But he served here for 50 years, 56 years, building up and praying for this parish in this church, despite society suggesting he should go to a better church, despite society not really wanting to be challenged by the good news of Jesus. So again, we have someone who invested in us in this place 200 years ago. And I'd like to think that we are part of his legacy, despite all the pressures he faced.

In our church now we have amazing people investing in our next generations. So the next question is, Who are you raising? Who are you investing in for the future? Who is going to be your legacy? We have so much going on in the church from youth work to schoolwork, people walking alongside people who are not necessarily young people, but who are still another generation. We think about Emma who's just been ordained; she had people who walked alongside her, not from here, she's a gift to us, but she was not a youth but she needed those people to raise her up even when she was at a later stage of life. And there's so many things we can do. We can pray, we

can ask parents, we can ask youth leaders, we can ask people who are a generation behind us what support they need.

And also we can think about how to pass things on. Do we write things down? Do we tell stories? When can we teach people what we have learned from our experience? When can we be an example to them? So I will leave it there. Thank you.