



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

Exodus 5: 18-23 'Making bricks without Straw'

[Pharaoh said:] ¹⁸ Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks.' ¹⁹ The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, 'You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks.' ²⁰ As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. ²¹ They said to them, 'The Lord look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odour with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.' ²² Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, 'O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me?' ²³ Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people.'

Recently I had to renew my home insurance, and noticed something strange, which I had not noticed for a long time. There was no 'Act of God' clause in the policy! Where had it gone? I started wracking my brains...wasn't this *always* included? Didn't insurance companies *always* pop this in as a catch-all? Surely even insurance companies need insurance too, and this was theirs – the ultimate clause to enable them to avoid a pay-out: 'Sorry, mate, it's an Act of God: your policy is invalid'. Someday I will investigate what's happened to this clause, whether it's fallen out of fashion, whether legally it no longer holds force, or whether secularisation has permeated even the insurance industry (and yes, I did write that last bit tongue-in-cheek).



The 'Act of God' clause does God no favours. 'Acts of God' for insurance purposes are usually interpreted to be sudden natural disasters, earthquakes, floods...and pandemics too. Anything unpredictable and beyond reasonable human control, and always in a negative context too. So maybe it's a good thing for us as a Christian community, that this immediately negative association with God's activity is being gradually consigned to the history books.

The passage of Exodus above gives a piece of Israelite history: the people forced into slave labour, and as things go from bad to worse, are even forced into making bricks without straw. Pharaoh punishes and complains at the Israelite supervisors; the Israelite supervisors complain to Moses and Aaron; Moses complains to God. Hmmm, it seems like blaming God is not a 21st Century insurance industry problem...humanity has got 'previous' in this area.

We need to be cautious about blaming God: either for doing things we don't want God to do, or for not doing things we want him to do. As tempting as it may be, we risk living a high-expectation, easily-disappointed and slightly childish faith that wants its own way all the time. Acts of God are in fact all around us: in creation, in our scriptures, in Jesus, in each one of us too. God is always active, always at work – and is never only there in times of trouble.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for forgiving us for the times we make demand after demand of you: 'Lord, if you would only...' and 'Lord, why don't you just...'
Loving God, grant us perspective, patience, and an abundant sense of your presence with us, that we may see your acts embedded in our lives, and in the lives of others. Amen.