

Sermon for 9th August 2009, 8:00am Service

As I was wondering what to say this morning, it felt right to put aside my planned sermon. When I thought of Joe and his strong faith and our sadness at his death, I had very much in my mind the words written by St Paul to the Thessalonians. They were confused about those among them who had died and Paul reassured them that all who have faith in Christ will be raised on the last day, and he tells the Thessalonians, "therefore encourage each other with these words."

So today with all our feelings for our dear Joe and for Nancy, I want to encourage you with a few words about our readings. I want to say just three short things:

- From our first reading, Elijah is at the end of his tether, he can't go on, all he can ask God for is death. He's had enough. And God's response to his desperation is gentle and kind and generous. God doesn't tell Elijah he's got to do this and that and the other and tell him off for not having hope, he just gives him what he needs - food, strength to carry on the journey for just a little while.

There are so many times and saw many circumstances which bring us to the end of our tether, which make us feel we just can't go any further. In times like that, where is God? Always at our side, always knowing how we feel. Often seen, unnoticed, but there nonetheless, waiting patiently to give us what we need so that we can face what lies ahead.

- In the gospel reading, when Jesus speaks about being the one who brings life, his words are met with grumbles and doubts. Jesus' response is to remind the complainers that the Father works in him and that everyone who believes in him will be raised up on the last day.

So often we are among the complainers and the doubters and we forget that Jesus promise of new life is true even for us. We try to believe and have faith in our own strength and we forget that faith is a gift from God, given to each one asks for it. And it is only when we have received this gift of faith from our generous God that we know the truth of his promise to raise us, and all those who turn to him, to new life. When we struggle to have faith, we need only ask - it doesn't really matter how skeptical or hopeless we feel at the time because God can cope with that. Because if we ask for faith, it will be given us as a free gift of God's grace.

- In v 49, Jesus reminds his friends about the way of the world. He says "your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and they died.... I am the living bread... whoever eats of this bread will live for ever." Listen to that generosity, whoever comes to Jesus, the living bread. That's what we hold onto as Christians - that it doesn't matter who we are or what

we've done, but who God is and what God has done in Jesus. Jesus offers life to each one who turns to him. The false hopes that the world gives us are useless, trust in money, material things, even other people, they all ultimately fade away like manna in the wilderness, they don't sustain us. The only true hope is in Jesus, the bread of life, who feeds us with treasures that will not fade, with the knowledge that our home is ultimately in him who loves each one of us very deeply.

I pray that God will comfort and encourage us in these things, and will give us the hope of eternal life, for ourselves and for Joe and for all who turn to God.

Blessings
Gill