

I have lost count of the number of times recently I have said that this has been a strange week – but that is the reality of life isn't it – things are not often as we expect, some days pass unnoticed, and then other days which start as mundane suddenly become memorable for many many reasons.

Yesterday afternoon I was sitting in Camden Market with some friends from Australia when I received a phone call to say that Trish was extremely poorly in the hospital, and so an afternoon that looked like it might involve relaxed eating and drinking around Camden, suddenly became all about Trish.

Trish past away quietly yesterday afternoon, she had had visits every day from people in the parish, and she had expressed to Alice yesterday morning that she knew she was surrounded by love, care and our prayers – and she was! She also had said she was tired, and this was true too.

The truth however is that we won't remember Trish for yesterday, we remember her for the mark that she made in this community, and many of our lives. I was struck therefore when I came home last night and was re-reading the passages set for today. The sermon I had been going to preach was focused on the reading we heard from John's Gospel and we will look at that briefly in a minute. But it was the opening of Paul's fourth chapter to the Ephesians which struck me as I reflected and prayed about yesterday.

*'I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'*¹

In the many phone calls that I made yesterday afternoon there was one constant image which was repeated over and over – Trish always made us feel she was interested in our lives, in the stories she told – and we too were interested in hers. She was one of those people who while being extremely systematic and organised also had an ability to work with true humility, gentleness and patience – virtues which the writer to the Ephesians tells us today are marks of Christ love.

Trish shared this, because it was what she experienced from others. I remember her telling me about the first day she came to St Anne's – 25-30 years ago? And how Betty Dass had taken her in hand and made her feel welcome and shown her love. And Trish went on to show the same care to many others, including many of us here today.

There will be many opportunities in the coming weeks and months to give thanks for Trish, but today I wondered as we mourn if we can learn from her and from the writer of the letter to the Ephesians.

¹ Ephesians 4:1-3

Ephesians 4:1 is a major hinge in the letter. Here the author turns from describing all that God has done for the cosmos, and to consider the kind of life that is the fitting response². How is it that we respond to the wonder of all that God has created, and what kind of life do we live?

The writer, whether it is Paul or another, is not talking about a particularly calling here – it is not about a task or an individual vocation; rather it is about the life which we are to live in response is the “worthy” (Ephesians 4:1) because such grace both calls for and calls forth a life that is in line with God’s intent for all creation.

The author here is not trying to divide or single out, rather is attempting to unite all within the church – to help us understand that together we work for the good, wonder and grace of all God’s creation. It is still an amazing vision; but it is more than a vision – it can be a reality when we take the time to live with the virtues which are placed before us here.

Which brings us nicely to our Gospel reading from John. This is the second week we continue our journey in John 6. Today is the follow on from last week when Jesus fed the 5000 then comes to the disciples walking on the water across the lake. When morning arrives, the crowd can’t find Jesus, so they go looking – and find him eventually around the lake in Capernaum.

Jesus is quite blunt with the crowd – you are looking for me for the wrong reasons – you come because I made bread and fish appear – enough to fill your stomachs – but it is not your stomachs I have come to fill – it is your spirit and your lives. Jesus wants them to understand the metaphor in what he is doing.

This is hard for many – including ourselves to hear – surely we start by feeding those who are hunger. But Jesus time is limited and he has a great deal to teach us, and the crowd – and they have to get beyond the physical to understand what it actually means to live in community – and live as chosen and loved by God.

In 1982 there was a great drought in the part of Australia that I lived in, in fact there is a similar drought taking place there at the moment. Then and now there has been no descent rain in over two years. It is hard to imagine in England, and especially London what that looks like. Fields and paddocks that once were either green or at least root systems for grass – are now so bare that when the wind blows the top soil blows away. When it did rain, it would wash the top soil off. Any places where there was still some grass would be covered from dust from the surrounding fields which made it unpalatable to sheep and cattle.

The cattle we had were either feed with wheat which was trucked in, and some of the cattle were trucked to land further north where there had been rain. But the sheep were starving, so my Father and a neighbour merged all their sheep into one mob – about 2000 head of sheep and took to the long paddock. That means that you

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3749

walk your sheep along the side of the roads and the stock eat the grass as they go along. They did this for nearly 3 months and during this time, they and their sheep walked more than 300km, 5 or 6 kms each day eating as they went. Finding water every day was a huge challenge.

I was a school, but on weekends, or when they had big roads or hills to cross I went out and travelled with them. It was a strange time, and a hard time for everyone. I have lots of strong memories from that period. But one is of one Saturday afternoon when we have been walking for about 6 weeks, our minister came and met us. For that weekend we were in a big paddock, with some large gum trees in it. We had a picnic BBQ, but before we ate we had a service together – just the two walking families, the minister, 2000 sheep and some dogs.

As we stood in that paddock and sung a hymn and broke bread together and gave thanks to go I felt full – I think we all did – not from the hunger of the drought – but from the hunger of the pain of the journey we were on. There was something about our shared prayer – our shared faith – that amidst all that was happening God, Jesus was walking with us.

Jesus message to those who were following him was that he did not come to fulfil just their physical hunger, but rather to truly transform their lives and to know that they are not alone. For me standing in that paddock with those sheep and my family was a formative moment in my faith – it is hard for me to deny God's presence – because on that day I knew God was there. There have been times since too!

Jesus was physically with the crowds who were following him around the lake, and he was challenging them, stretching them to look beyond the horror or even pain of their immediate need to see more fully the presence of God with them.

Jesus is giving an outward and visible sign of all that is possible in the kingdom of God, of all that is possible if we love God and dare to love ourselves.

This is why we come and share the Eucharist each week – it is an outward sign of our inward journey. When the crowd ask for a sign Jesus says to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

This is always the message of our faith, whether we are grieving, or giving thanks for a life – or even in the changes and challenges we face each day. Our sharing in this Eucharist unites us, nurtures us, but most importantly calls us each to visibly live with *humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love*

Amen.