



11am Choral Eucharist The 12th Sunday after Trinity 2021

Today's first reading encapsulates so much of the glorious technicolour sweep of the Old Testament. The story is of God's love for humanity, His call for us to be in love with Him, our *sort of* getting the point, then our drifting off, and it inevitably falls apart and things go terribly, and then God calls us home, and then we sort of get it, and then we drift away again, and so it goes round again and again. Indeed this drama is still be played out today. It's certainly true of my life, I'm sure it is of yours too. It is and will be true of Ann Marie, Emma, Jayden, Yasmin and Malique who are being baptized today, and their relationship with God too. But today's snippet from Joshua, whilst encapsulating all this, is a *lovely* episode. It's one of the moments of us 'getting it', coming home to God, and renewing our covenant with Him.

The blood, wrath and fire of the Old Testament aren't so much the petulant punishments of an angry God, but simply the natural consequences of what happens when we human beings wander off. When we misuse and

misunderstand who we are, who God is, what we're for, how we are to live together – guess what happens? When we abuse our planet, ourselves and each other, it's not really fair of us to cry 'why, God why?' because our own hands were in this. What the ancients saw as divine punishment is perhaps more often than not, simply the natural consequences of the world we make for each other.

But despite all our stupidity and wandering off the path again and again, our shepherd is faithful and 'His mercy endureth forever'. That's God's promise, to Ann Marie, Emma, Jayden, Yasmin and Malique and every single person.

And that brings us to today's Gospel. Just because God is transcendent mystery and totally *Other* does not in any way impede his desire for intimate, loving relationship with us. At each stage of the human journey God has made Himself known and made ways for us to *be* with Him. Our forebears gazed up at the sun and sought God. Our Hebrew ancestors met Him on the mountain top and in the Tent, and then the Temple. These signs and wonders were perfected in Jesus, God made human. At each stage, God has made a way for us to be with Him. He does so today, too.

When Christ ascended into heaven following His Resurrection He was not absenting Himself. We know that thanks to the great gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, God is with us now in 'spirit and in life', says Jesus today.

The Eucharist is not a 'nice thing *some* churches' do; a 'traditional ceremony some people enjoying doing every now and then'. It is a direct gift from God in the power of the Holy Spirit: God's way of us being with Him now.

So to my holiday snaps... I will spare you a slide show presentation of me eating ice cream and sitting in pub gardens, you'll be pleased to know. But I was so encouraged by the Sundays I had off this summer. We are told the Church of England is dying. We're told nobody goes to Church anymore. We are told the only way to solve this problem is to Dum down, constantly inject novelty, or turn worship into a rather naff version of a school assembly, or whatever. Well, I potted into two ordinary country parish churches on my 2 Sundays off, the nearest to where I was staying each time. I discovered lively communities of welcome, pretty-full socially-distant pews, with a good mix of people, nourishing and intelligent preaching on the Scriptures, and deep Eucharistic worship with due dignity and sincerity of heart. And the most important of those is the Eucharist.

There is simply no substitute for Sunday Holy Communion. Churchy pop music is lovely, praying for people is vital, reading the Bible at home is ever-so important, having nice thoughts and chatting to God as we watch the sunset or sit by a tinkling brook is really rather nice; and all ways in which God speaks His love to us. But God actually gave us the Eucharist *on purpose*. In today's Gospel Jesus says: 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them'. 'Do this' He said. He meant it. The Eucharist is His love come into our lives week by week. It is our foretaste of eternal life: 'bread' that has 'come down from heaven', Jesus says today.

As the baptized people of God, the Sunday Eucharist (and midweek if we can too) is as essential for us as plugging in your mobile phone to charge the battery. Just like the Hebrews we have ups and downs, wanderings and the rest. But Sunday Holy Communion remains, through all of that, God with us. This love-feast is our identity and our calling, our work on behalf of the world, our obligation, our sanctification, our medicine, our sacrifice, and our joy. Just as in the days of Joshua, God is faithful, He is calling you, and Ann Marie, Emma, Jayden, Yasmin and Malique and all of us, to Him and has *given us* the means to respond. 'O come, O taste and see how gracious the Lord is.'