

Sermon Sunday 12th August 2018

**May I speak in the name of God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

Have you noticed
That stories in the Bible
are full of movement?
full of movement and encounter

The story of the Lord's covenant people
The Jewish nation
Begins with Abraham
Encountering God

Leaving his home
In accordance with God's command

To travel to an unknown land
promised to him and his descendants

the great stories
of Exodus

of Exile and return

of Salvation

are stories of journeys
of encounters with God
and encounters with people

so the setting for our first reading
a man plainly on a journey
is not surprising

But the passage from
The 1st book of Kings
We heard read this morning

Makes me feel
As if I have walked into a film
Well into the action

Now I have to admit
That when I come in
Half way through a film
I will ask potentially
Annoying questions

Questions like

Who's he?

Is he important?

Why is he doing that?

And sometimes....

How does this end?

Elijah is a prophet

And yes

Elijah is important

And also

Elijah is running away

Running from the wrath of Jezebel

Because he has killed

hundreds of the prophets of Baal

And Elijah is here

Alone in the wilderness

Miserable

Apparently defeated

And he tells God

that he has failed

he says

'I am no better than my ancestors'

Elijah despairs and waits for death

Elijah has given up

But God has not given up on Elijah.

God provides him with food

So that he has strength

To continue on his journey.

And provides a helpful Angel

Who taps Elijah on the shoulder

And tells him the food is there.

And Elijah eats, and sleeps,

And eats again.

And moves on,

Elijah stays true to his calling
And if we read on,
We see that Elijah's journey
Brings him an encounter with God on a mountain,

And there he is given a new commission.
Elijah is sent on his way
Elijah keeps moving.

The stories of Jesus
are filled with journeys
and encounters

in the Synoptic gospels
the Gospels of Matthew,
Mark and Luke

Jesus' journey is reasonably direct
He begins his ministry in Galilee
And steadily moves to Jerusalem
To a place of suffering and death

In John's Gospel
Jesus path is less straightforward
Less linear

Jesus travels back and forth
From Galilee to Jerusalem
And stops off in places on the way

And during his travels
Jesus encounters
A range of people
Some like Nicodemus
Seek him out

Others
Like the Samaritan woman
at the well
stumble upon him

Jesus does not settle in one place
But moves on
Slipping away from the crowds
Refusing to be confined,

Refusing to be selective in his company,
Seeking out tax collectors and sinners

And eating with them.

Then in today's gospel reading
Jesus encounters a group of people
Who wish to contain him

the Jewish leaders
seek to diminish Jesus
With the words
'we know his parents'

With the subtext
We know where he comes from
How can he be anything different from us?
What can he tell us about God?

When Jesus tells them
'I am the bread of life'
'I am the living bread
That comes down from heaven'

The Jewish leaders complain about him
and move from doubting his words
To complete and violent rejection of him

The Jewish leaders cannot hear,
Perhaps don't want to hear.
The truth of the gift
God is making in Jesus
The gift of himself.
Real food for the journey.
The bread of life.

The people try to confine Jesus,
To contain him,
To dismiss him,
But Jesus cannot be contained by us
Or by our limited expectations.

And following his death and resurrection
The Christian disciples
His followers
were not contained either

They moved outwards
Taking the Good News
To the ends of the earth

Living as a Christian disciple,
 Is often compared
 with being on a journey.
 a journey of faith for each individual
 a journey of faith for communities of Christians

Now anyone who has
 Been part of a Christian community
 Shares a secret

The secret is
 That other people can be really annoying
 And most human beings
 are equipped with a default setting
 To resist any kind of change

the second reading this morning
 A letter to the Christian community in Ephesus
 Addresses this issue
 even from the beginning
 Communities of Christians
 Had their difficulties

And here the author suggests rules
 For community life

The key is always to build up
 The life of the community

To strive to imitate God
 In behaviour marked
 By grace and generosity

Grace and generosity
 which are the essential nature of God
 That is why we are here
 We have been touched by God's grace
 we have received the Good News of Christ,
 The knowledge that God loves us,
 And that in that love we can flourish
 And be fully who God created us to be.

And once we have accepted God's love,
 we are compelled
 to share that love with others

A theologian wrote:
 'To know that God loves us,

To accept the gratuitous gift
of his love
Is the profound sense of happiness
to those who live
according to the word.
To communicate this happiness
is to evangelise.'

The Mission of the church
is to communicate God's love
to a broken world.

To do this,
To continue on our journey,
we need food.

And because we are human,
there are times
When, like Elijah, we despair
Or believe we have failed,

At those times we need other people
to direct us to that food.
To tap us on the shoulder
encourage us to eat it
and then to send us on our way.

Remembering that the word 'Angel'
just means 'messenger',
And at times each of us will be God's messenger,
for other Christians and for our community.

Jesus said 'I am the bread of life'
and gave us himself.

We remember those words
Every time we gather together
And celebrate the Eucharist.
We bring ourselves
Our joy and our despair
To Jesus
And in return Jesus gives us himself
gives us food for our journey.