

Sermon 8.8.21

Trinity 10

By Joy Dipple

2 Samuel 18:5-9,15,31-33 John 6:35,41-51

Many people have real struggles in life, and that has undoubtedly been the case these last 18 months. It may not be a good idea to wallow in self-pity, or alternatively to sport too much of a stiff upper lip, but it is certainly okay to not be okay, and in our Old Testament reading David is certainly not okay.

When he was chosen to become God's anointed king after Saul, he was chosen because he was a man after God's own heart. He messed up badly at times but he was nevertheless a follower of God. His prayer with the Lord was one of total honesty and it is honesty that God values in our communication with Him. It is what He can work with. The psalms of David, as an example, contain an honesty which speaks to the human condition, particularly those that express lament. In the second book of Samuel we see David's life portrayed with all its highs and lows, and at the end of today's reading we see one of the most profound expressions of sorrow in a Father's heartache over the loss of his son.

Absalom had treacherously turned against his father, but David still loved his son and asked his commanders to be gentle with Absalom despite the combat that was to take place between them. When Absalom was caught in the branches of a tree Joab, one of David's commanders, took the opportunity to strike 3 javelins into Absalom's heart, and his armour-bearers continued the assault.

Was Joab wrong to disobey his king? Absalom was a man of treason whose death would salvage David's kingdom. David cried out that he wished he had died in the place of his son, but perhaps Absalom's death was necessary.

As we move into the passage from John's Gospel we see the prophetic words of Jesus as another son who would give his flesh for the life of the world. Those who ate the manna that God provided in the wilderness still died, but Jesus as the bread of life would provide nourishment for his followers both in this world and in the world to come; and last week we began to look at Jesus as the bread of life.

Jesus was sometimes very forthright about who He was and what His mission was. As we know, His description of Himself as the bread of life was the first of the seven 'I am' sayings that explicitly pointed to His divine status and role: 'I am' the bread of life; the light of the world; the gate for the sheep; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life; the way, the truth and the life; and the true vine. Jesus admits He has come from heaven and has seen The Father. There is a divine connection that is alluded to in the 'I am' sayings.

Of course we today have the benefit of hindsight. As we celebrate the Eucharist we acknowledge the Lord as the bread of life. We know He gave His life and rose again as a sign of our own future resurrection in eternity.

If I had been there when Jesus spoke those words, would I have understood them; would any of us? One can understand those who were puzzled. Here was Jesus talking about having come from heaven, but He had been a local boy. He was the son of Mary and Joseph, a carpenter. They were His earthly parents. How could He have had a connection with God in heaven?

Jesus said no-one could come to Him unless The Father draws them to Him. It is indeed our own story. All of you who are here today, or who are watching today, are here because you either already know of that connection between The Father and The Son, or you are on the journey into acknowledging that divine connection. To study the scriptures is to understand the prophetic insight of God's story (and ours) as it unfolds through creation to the culmination of all things on the last day, when we are raised by Christ into the realm of the newly restored kingdom of God.

In this life we are nourished by Christ's continued life in the Spirit following His giving of Himself on the Cross – His flesh, His nourishment, given for us and to us. The manna in the wilderness provided physical nourishment for the body, but the bread of life provides a continuum of nourishment into eternity. We have meaning to our lives in the here and now as a result, and hope, real hope, for the future. It is a good news message both for us, and others, whom The Father is also drawing into the fold.

King David had wanted to die in place of his son, despite the son's wrong-doing. In Jesus we have the one who really did die for others – to save us from our own wrong-doing; and as we prepare for communion let's now take a moment or two to reflect on the enormity of what Christ has done for us.