

Sermon: 8 August 2021; More bread from Heaven 1 Kgs 19: 4-8; Eph 4: 25-5: 2; Jn 6: 35, 41 -51

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week the sermon was built around the phrase *'believe, have faith, obey'*. Today our question might be *Who is Jesus?* In a culture as ancestrally connected as ours ... we can perhaps understand how *the Jews* felt justified in murmuring against Jesus. *Is this not Jesus, whose mother and father we know?* Some of us might hold similar feelings about folk who were born here ... I told you once about a comment heard at the back of the church, at a funeral when it was revealed that the person who had died at age 80 something, and who had married a local and never moved away, had moved here with their parents at the age of about two ... *"I didn't think he was one of us."*

As you know this connection with *place* runs counter to my own experience of life before and during my life in the Army, and since. In many ways I envy the deep connection with place and history. Maori culture holds this same deep and abiding sense of *tangata whenua* (the people of the land, the people from here, *this place*). Those of us who *belong* have something that others don't. But we Christians need to be careful that this attitude doesn't shape our engagement with those who God sends us to love. In our Christian context who is it that *belongs* in a given place?

I am the bread who came down from heaven ... No-one can come to me unless drawn by the Father ... I will raise that person up on the last day ... whoever believes has eternal life.

One of the things that we sometimes forget about this process of belonging or *becoming* is that we are first called by God ... we don't decide to come to Him ... He calls us, makes us aware of a separation between Him and us ... *and then* leaves us to

make our free will choice, to move towards Him or not. This space belongs to God and so do we. So do all the others that we share this space with, whether they know it or not. When Jesus talks (v. 45) about *God teaching us*, He is recalling the words of Isaiah chapters 54 and 55, that speak of renewal through bringing His people back from exile, inviting them to come to the waters and drink freely. We fit in in a similar way ... only when we are *humble enough*, do we recognise *who Jesus is* and become able to eat His bread from heaven.

The children of Israel had to learn during their journey through the wilderness that YHWH wasn't at their beck and call. They weren't rescued because they were a great nation, or because they were more morally correct or godly than anybody else ... God simply made *a loving choice* to make them His people. *The whole idea was that through them He would make His love known throughout the whole world for all eternity.* This is not the work of a capricious God; He did not favour them by excluding others ... we each have the option to accept His love as our own and become the chosen ones. And yet the people grumbled and murmured against Moses ... provoking God from the midst of our weakness.

Eternal life is more than just *life after death*. It's not something that happens when our current *life* becomes extinct, nor is *heaven a place where we go* when we die. Eternal life is a whole new way of being ... *in Christ* ... that begins at our conversion and continues forever. Eternity is a *forever from now on hope*; it arrives in part when we ask Jesus to take away our sin and agree to leave everything behind and *believe*, and it is revealed in all its glorious detail as we arrive into God's presence at the last day. Jesus is

the person, the Son of God, who both reveals and enables our transition. He lets us see things the way that God wants us to ... if we *believe, have faith and obey*.

My experience is though, that not even the bread of heaven is free from the lumps and bitties that get stuck between our teeth from time to time. In this imperfect world we are presented with a series of challenges and tests; in part because we listen imperfectly, we make mistakes whether we mean to or not, but also in part to improve our ability to deal with harder stuff to come. In all of this Jesus' promise endures. When we find ourselves at odds with Him ... we can turn again, seek His forgiveness, humble ourselves and move forward in faith, in Him.

Every now and then we hear of one band of Christians or another, one faith community or another that think they are exclusively the *chosen ones* ... only they will be saved. We are however called to live *in the world* and to love God's people wherever we find them. If we set ourselves apart before we are called to do so, we run the risk of closing ourselves off from the very people God wants us to witness to ... *the last, the least and the lost* ... those He places where we will find them ... and show them the way. This is God's space, not ours ... He is at the centre, it is His work we are sent to do, not our own.

On Friday just gone we remembered the Transfiguration of Jesus; that moment just after Peter reveals that he finally understands who Jesus really is. Jesus takes Peter and James and John up a mountain to witness His glorification and His meeting with Moses and Elijah. Peter and his companions personally witness a revelation of God; that Jesus was His Son and they were to listen to Him. Peter tried hard to hold on to the moment, offering to build shelters for them, and feed the heavenly trio, but Jesus had other ideas.

From this point on Jesus' ministry takes a different direction ... towards Jerusalem and His crucifixion ... towards the culmination of His ministry among us. This season encourages me to take a step back, have a think about the obstacles that we put in the path of others ... those unintentional barriers that keep those who are different from us *over there* ... those things that others find intimidating about *what and who* we are.

Rather than put ourselves at the centre, let's take some time this coming week to remember and give thanks for *Whose we are, and what He calls us to be ... His hope for the world. Amen.*