

Sunday 23rd August 2015

Joshua 24:1-2,14-18, Ephesians 6:10-20, John 6:56-69

Last Saturday after being in the park for the Passion Play I saw the last bit of one of the Indian Jones films - Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, that is the one with Sean Connery who plays Indiana Jones father - they go searching for the Holy Grail which will give eternal life.

You will remember that when they arrive at the place the bad guys are already there, they are seen, Sean Connery is shot in his stomach and Indiana has to lead the way, two 'volunteers' have already lost their heads.....of course he gets to the place where the last guard is watching and waiting for the one who will come to take over from him.

The bad guys follow and choose the wrong cup so that when he drinks he dies and guard say he chose poorly, our hero chooses wisely and drinks and then takes some back to pour onto his father's wound...which is healed. But there is a price to pay; the cup cannot be taken past the seal of the cave.

Jesus is saying - the one who eats this bread will live foreverthose who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

This is the fifth and final week from John 6 about the bread of life and in fact the last paragraph from last week's reading is repeated today so what do we take from that?

You will remember that we had the feeding of the 5000 a few weeks ago where they were all fed with the five loaves and two fish....and then Jesus is saying 'I am the bread of life' etc and now repeatingto a group of followers, and is teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

And when many of them heard they said this teaching is difficult, who can accept it...you can almost hear the muttering and complaining. And I think that many of us might agree that some of Jesus' teaching is difficult.

This passage speaks in a language in a world of ideas which are strange to us, but to those who heard it first they were familiar ideas. These ideas would be quite normal to anyone brought up in ancient sacrifice.

The animal was very seldom burned entirely, usually only a token part was burned on the altar, although the whole animal was offered to the god. Part of the flesh was given to the priests and part to the worshipper to make a feast for himself and his friends within the temple precincts.

At that feast the god himself was held to be a guest, once the flesh had been offered to the god, it was held that he entered into it; and therefore when the worshipper ate it he was literally eating the god.

So after such a feast when they went out the people believed they were god filled....so to people used to this kind of experience this did not present difficulties.

Jesus said to drink his blood, in Jewish thought the blood stands for the life. As the blood flows from a wound, life ebbs away; and to the Jew the blood belonged to God. That is why a true Jew never eats any meat which has not been completely drained of blood.

When Jesus said we must drink his blood he meant that we must take his life into the very core of our hearts. Jesus said 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'.

Jesus knew there were those who did not believe - this is why he said 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father'.....this is different we usually hear 'no one can come to the Father except through me'.

And many of them turned back, when Jesus asked the 12 if they wished to go away good old Simon Peter 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life'.

We represent the 12 who stayed behind, we are called to discipleship but we do have to work at it with prayer, with learning, growing, called to live the gospel.

John is not giving, or trying to give, the actual words of Jesus. He has been thinking for seventy years of what Jesus said; and now, led by the Holy Spirit, his giving the inner meaning of his words.

It is not the words that he reports; that would just have taken a good memory. It is the essential meaning of the words; that is the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In Joshua at last the people say that they will serve the Lord, for he is our God and in the letter to the Ephesians we have the wonderful imagery of putting on the whole armour of God, a bit like if you are playing cricket having the kit, the whites of course, trousers, shirt and jumper, pads even down to some protective cream on the face to stop the skin burning.

The writer uses the imagery from the kit of the Roman army at that time. They were the best equipped, the best trained fighting force in the world, present in every corner of the empire.

So these words would evoke images of invincible strength, God's power defending God's people even more effectively than the state of the art Roman technology. To stand firm and defend the right is not an impossible task with God at one's shoulder.

The Christian community at Ephesus faced harassment and occasional persecution and Christians today still experience huge pressure in everyday life.

And its this armour that will help us to stand against the wiles of the devil, against the powers of this present darkness and there is plenty of darkness.

As Paul says we must make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel...well the Passion Play last week was certainly bold, it was an amazing experience for the group that have worked on it for the last couple of years.....

....at the beginning of the year we had no director and a very small cast, I think just 6 people came to the auditions....God certainly had a hand in all this.....we had a director and what a director we had a cast of 70 and about 40 volunteers for each day.

For the large numbers of people who came and watched and for the passers by who were drawn in the Gospel was declared boldly, I think people were amazed by what they saw and that this should happen in Havant. I'm sure many seeds were planted.....

We are challenged always to find ways of meeting people where they are, we must be prepared to stop some things and try new things.....

In a couple of weeks time 6th September we are beginning a new service Café Church, they will happen on the 1st and 3rd Sundays.....a new style of service for us, relaxed and informal, with coffee and cake we will be taking the shield of faith and boldly sharing the good news.

And pray, pray in the Spirit at all times, the collect for today begins:
Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than either we desire or deserve.....

So when asked 'Do you also wish to go away' like Peter our answer surely will be 'Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.' Eternal life is right now in this moment, thus to receive the gift of eternal life is to live now.
Amen.