

As with last Sunday, we once again have the delight and privilege of welcoming a child into the fellowship of the Church in Baptism. I always think that a Baptism gives us wonderful opportunities to reflect on what it means to be a Christian, to reflect on our own Christian discipleship. Then our readings this morning give us much food for thought. In our Gospel reading, we are continuing in our reading of John chapter 6, teaching that comes back again and again to Jesus' words concerning himself, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.'

In the rearing of Ted, one of the first things Dave and Joanna have had to get right is feeding. There is a growing awareness of the importance of diet both in the womb and in the early stages of life.

There is also the importance of developing good behaviour patterns. As we grow up, we all have to learn that the world does not revolve around what I want. Already Ted will be learning the give and take of what it means to live in a family. We all have our preferences – what I want to eat, to watch on TV, films, holidays. Ted of course will have his – I want more milk, I want biscuits, I want to be changed, I don't want to go to sleep. We learn at an early age that 'I' doesn't always get its way – that is how healthy families, healthy relationships, healthy communities grow – selfishness breeds resentments in families, in communities.

With these thoughts in mind, let us turn to the words used to introduce the promises that will be made on Ted's behalf later in this service:

In baptism, God calls us from darkness into his marvellous light.
To follow Christ means dying to sin and rising to new life with him.

How do we lift that out of the realm of theological jargon that just slips off the tongue? As we do so, we'll just hold that picture of poor Ted learning that what he wants doesn't always hold sway.

To follow Christ, to walk in the steps of him who, in the Garden of Gethsemene, as he contemplated what lay ahead, prayed:

⁴² "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." *Luke 22:42*

Jesus lived a life of close communion with the Father, one in which what God wants lay at the heart of his whole life – a life if you like of 'I' crossed out. And so we have the cross – a symbol of Jesus' total commitment to the Father, a symbol of the extent of God's love for us – 'God so loved the world that he gave'.

How do we, complex creatures that we are, respond to this love of God in Christ? We have all known in ourselves that turmoil that Paul talks about in his letter to the Romans:

¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. *Romans 7:19*

that tension between what God wants and what I want, between the power of sin and the will of God. Against that I set the closing words of that lovely old hymn, 'When I survey the wondrous cross'

love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

What I want begins to be displaced more and more by what God wants. That demanding 'I' in my life displaced more and more by what God wants.

Dying to sin, rising to new life in him. Do you notice – both of those are in the present? What we are talking about here is an ongoing process that goes on

through the whole of my Christian life, as what I want becomes less and less important and what God wants comes more and more to the fore. This is what is described by that lovely old word ‘sanctification’. Not that we get it right all the time, not that there aren’t set backs along the way. But we are on this journey that we’ve thought about before, a journey to God and into God. Bit by bit the ‘I’ is crossed out as I draw closer and closer to him. This is where words from our First lesson, from the letter to the Ephesians, strikes a chord with me:

we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ

Growing up in every way into Christ. This is where we find our true self, as one made in the image of God, redeemed by God, beloved by God.

Over the coming years, Ted will be taking his place in the family. As his young body grows, nourishment, the right nourishment will play a vital role. This will be taken not in isolation, but around the table as the news of the day is shared, family stories are told, as joys are celebrated, as disappointments and fears understood.

May he find his place within the family of the Church; may he find in the fellowship of this place, in you and in me (as ones who are in ourselves on this journey of growing into Christ) something of that same Christ who loved us and gave himself for us, and be drawn to feed on him who is the very Bread of Life.

A prayer for ourselves and Ted along this journey of life, one of the collects at Morning Prayer:-

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord,
to know you is eternal life, and to serve you is perfect freedom:
Defend us in all assaults of our enemies,
that we, surely trusting in your protection,

may not fear the power of any adversaries;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.