

Over the past couple of weeks we have welcomed families as they have brought their children to be baptised. Baptism is one of the great Gospel sacraments and we find its meaning in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the early days when total immersion was the norm, the person to be baptised went right down into the water. The old person went down and the new person came up. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,

And so the promises are introduced with those lovely words

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.

Dying, rising, these are ongoing processes that continues through life, as we let go of the old and lay hold of the new. Last week we read those lovely words from the Letter to the Ephesians – of growing into Christ, becoming more and more like Christ.

If you like it is a movement between the ‘no longer’ of the past towards the ‘not yet’ of the future that is summed up in Paul’s words in his letter to the Philippians:

¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Dying to sin – rising to new life ... The life of faith is a movement between the ‘no longer’ of the past and the ‘not yet’ of the future. A letting go of past fears,

past regrets, past failures, past resentments and reaching out to a new future in Christ who has made me his own. This is the basis of the trust in our trusting obedience of faith; a handing over of our cares, our anxieties; a placing of our plans, our projects into the hands of God.

The life of faith – a life of trusting obedience of the God who has encountered me and redeemed me in Christ. An integral part of that trusting obedience is a willingness to serve coupled with a willingness to be served; a willingness to offer myself in service of God and his Church coupled with that willingness to be waited upon, to be ministered to by Christ himself..

There is something of the dynamic of the communion service in all this. We come not trusting in our own righteousness but in God's manifold and great mercy, not worthy to gather up the crumbs under his table and yet in hands outstretched at the communion rails we seek God's reconciling and renewing strength.

Our Gospel reading continues in our reading of the 6th chapter of John's Gospel. Following on from the feeding of the multitude, there is a long discourse on feeding, the contrast between the manna given in the desert of Sinai and God's provision in Jesus as the true bread that comes down from heaven. There follows the passage we read as our Gospel reading today. It is couched in language rich in symbolism, that needs to be set in the context of the approaching Passover Festival, with its themes of sacrifice. Language that also needs to be set in the context of Jesus' approaching death and resurrection and also the Christian Eucharist.

In the passage we have just read, John tells us of Jesus saying,

‘Jesus said to the Jews: ⁵¹‘I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.’

He will go to say:

....‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.’

Eating and drinking ... abiding in me and I in you this speaks of intimacy, of identification. To eat of the body is to identify with the death of Jesus – the body of Christ given for you. To drink of the blood is to identify with the risen life of Jesus – the blood of Christ shed for you. There is something life giving, life enhancing in this identification, this encounter with the crucified and risen Christ.

Drawing near to Christ, being fed by Christ, we close our service with a prayer of dedication to the service of Christ:

Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the spiritual food
of the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.

May we go out from this place to live the faith we profess, in trusting obedience of the one who has met us in Christ, as ones sent out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to the praise and glory of God.