

Reflection for Pentecost 13 by Rev'd Peter Shaw

Many years ago, we had a caravan. At the time, it was an affordable, enjoyable and fun way of spending our holidays, particularly when Jamie was little, and having time away from the demands of commuting to London and working on London Underground.

We even took it abroad in 1993 when we made an epic trip to Dresden in the former East Germany, only some 3 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain. It was fascinating – in the now former East Germany, we experienced the joy and optimism of its' people now released from living in a police state and grappling with new ways of living and doing things. In Dresden we saw the last of the Soviet troops getting ready to leave. More poignantly, we saw the remains of the Frauenkirche, the Lutheran Cathedral church in the centre of the city, destroyed in the bombing of February 1945, now beautifully restored and reconsecrated on 30 October 2005. It is topped by a two-tonne gold cross. The main craftsman on the project to make this cross was Alan Smith whose father, Frank Smith, flew one of the RAF bombers that destroyed Dresden; a symbol indeed, of reconciliation between our two nations, also expressed in the twinning of Dresden with Coventry, something so sorely needed in today's world!

But I digress!

When caravanning, we preferred dry weather, but were able to make ourselves comfortable whatever the weather threw at us. For us, the caravan was our own bit of real estate wherever we were – our own home – somewhere to go wherever we were.

When the modern state of Israel was formed in 1948, the surrounding Arab nations attacked to drive the Jews into the sea. The fledgling state survived with an increased area. The same result has ensued on each successive occasion when they have been attacked. The most notable example was the Six-Day War in June 1967 during which Israel gained Jerusalem and the West Bank, the strategic Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula (since given back to Egypt). Asked the secret of their success, an Israeli official replied, *"We have a secret weapon - we have nowhere else to go!"*

I do wonder sometimes about those people who have no faith of any sort, no spiritual beliefs – relying entirely on the materialistic things of this world. What happens when the chips are down? Do they feel as though they have nowhere else to go? Do we feel that sometimes, when life is particularly hard, difficult and brutal – such that we start to question our Faith, our belief in God? Do we sometimes feel that trying to live our lives as Christians is too hard.

Do we then start to waver?

Jesus tells us later on in John 14; *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me"* (Jn 14.6).

In today's reading, the disciples themselves were coming to this realisation. Many of his followers *"turned back and would not go with him any more"* (6.66). *They found his teaching "too hard"* - in the sense of what he was expecting of them. So Jesus said to the twelve, *"And you - would you also like to leave?"* Simon Peter answered him, *"Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God"* (vv. 67-69).

"The words that give eternal life" - nowhere else to go! No need to search any

further! Here is the one to believe in, the one to trust our life to, the one to “rest our whole weight on”.

Here is the true Bread of life. But - have you noticed? - a loaf of bread, no matter how wonderful it looks and smells, only fulfils its purpose when it is broken. This Bread of life too will be broken. Jesus makes it graphically clear that the Bread is not his miracles, his teaching or even his lifestyle. He himself is the Bread and his physical life will be given for them - his very flesh and blood. They will have to receive into their very being what he is going to do for them.

They understood well enough that Jesus wasn't calling them to cannibalism. He was giving himself to them, his very life to them. He wasn't talking about the sacrament of the Eucharist either, though that sacrament sets out very graphically our need to receive the redemptive work of Christ into our very being. It is Christ himself whom we are to “feed upon... in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving,” as the *“Invitation to Communion”* says in our order of Service. Then we live in Christ and he lives in us (v. 56).

So, who is this Jesus, for whose birth the angels sang, *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”* (Lk. 2.14)?

Who is this Jesus, who taught as no one else had taught, who lived out a life of love and care for others?

Who is the Jesus, who called the four fishermen, *“Come with me, and I will teach you to catch people”* (Mt. 4.19)?

Who is this Jesus, who invites all who hear him, *“Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest”* (Mt. 11.28)?

Who is this Jesus, whom the crowds welcomed into Jerusalem, *“Hosanna! God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord! God bless the King of Israel!”* (Jn 12.13)?

Who is this Jesus, rejected, yet, even as he suffered the slow and painful death by crucifixion, could pray, *“Forgive them, Father! They don't know what they are doing”* (Lk. 23.34)?

Who is this Jesus, whose body is no longer in the grave, of whom the angels said, *“He is not here; he has risen!”* (Lk. 24.6 NIV)?

How do we Respond?

Remember how Jesus asked the twelve whether they would leave him too. Peter responded, *“Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we believe and know that you are the Holy One who has come from God”* (John 6.68-69). Elsewhere in the Gospels, we hear Peter's mind blowing statement, *“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”* (Mt. 16.16).

The unique life of Christ was given for us and he is alive for us! The real Bread of life - broken, available for our deepest need!

So how do we respond to him?

Jesus did not come to be a divine decoration in our human history. The real Bread of life was broken for us. But a loaf of bread can only fulfil its purpose when it is eaten.

The living Christ invites us to believe in him, to welcome him and to live for him.

Let us receive him now - and offer him to others in our hungry world!

So as Jesus' disciples realised, we need never find ourselves in the situation where we have “nowhere else to go”.

Thanks be to God for sending us His only Son Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN