**SERMON FOR CORPUS CHRISTI | 06.06.21**

**1 Kings 17: 9-16; 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26; St John 6: 51-58**

**There is always something almost electric that happens when someone is generous – when someone gives away something that really costs them. To see the eyes of a child light up when they have been given something quite unexpected – perhaps at Christmas - gives us a flavour of that but often generosity comes in the middle of a very mundane day when the ordinary turns into the extraordinary.**

**That was the gift of Tony Eastlake, the Essex Road flower seller murdered last Saturday. The effort that he put into the flower arrangements he placed into countless hands over 40 years was generous and warm-hearted and we can all understand why the reaction to his death has been so universal. As an inscription on a tomb stone once said, the person did ‘kind things kindly’ – with an open heart and a genuine lack of care for themselves.**

**Today, Corpus Christi, we are recalling the generosity of God. Hopefully all of us can point to examples of that throughout our lives when what we received was, literally, a God-send. And when we come together, we too tend to recall God’s generosity through stories. The one chosen for us to think over is the famous occasion when Elijah was caught in a major famine – and in hostile pagan territory where his brand of religion was not exactly popular.**

**So there he is at the gate in Zaraphath when he sees a women doing a very ordinary thing: gathering wood for a fire. She is, of course, a total stranger, and still he has the nerve to ask her, first for some water (a common enough request by travellers) and then for something to eat.**

**And so we get her response: *we have nothing to spare. This wood is for a fire to cook our last meal. We have literally run out of everything.* She and her son were expecting to die of hunger like many, before and since.**

**A man of less faith might well have had the decency to leave the women alone: isn’t she distraught enough? But no, Elijah has heard the voice of God who promises to give this story a happy ending: if she will share what she has, that jar of meal and that small store of oil will not fail any of them until the famine comes to an end. But she has to believe this ‘man of God’ – who was a foreigner to boot.**

**There is something slightly unsettling about this account when we stop treating it like an odd story from a very long time ago. Because drought is drought: there are plenty of places we could name where drought is still endemic and there are all too many widows scared to death that their frugal resources are going to run out.**

**But this story is not – for example - about the need for our government to restore our commitment to .7% of our budget for international aid and an end to the hypocrisy that declares that the aid cut is about the pandemic. No this is more fundamental even than that: this is about what happens when we are faced with a lack of something we need (and it can be anything at all) - and we are given a clear steer by someone among us with the gift of prophecy who tells us what the solution is. What do we do? Do we listen or do we dismiss them with that world-weary cynicism that suggests that the outcome is already decided?**

**It is precisely the same challenge that Moses faced when the people had escaped from Egypt and they too thought they too were going to die for lack of food. What does Moses tell those constantly complaining? That God had already planned for manna to be ready for collection in the morning. The Word of the Lord would transform the dew; they would not starve.**

**Meal and oil for the woman of Zaraphath; manna for the Israelites in the desert. Elijah and Moses. And the Word of the Lord which would transform their situations.**

**On this Sunday each year, Corpus Christi, we too are being reminded that we are also not to go without. We are taken back to the Upper Room where Jesus shares the bread of the traditional Passover meal and he tells them (and us) strange things about how this bread will become his Body and that it will *last for ever.***

**Not because we are starving nutritionally but because we need to see how the Word of God as spoken in the Eucharistic Prayer transforms mere bread and turns it into the means by which we are saved from death – from spiritual death. When we draw our hands into the shape of the Cross and allow the bread to be given to us, our lives are broken and then put together again with the generosity of God every bit as real and life-saving as the bread which the pagan women of Sidon was able to enjoy when Elijah found his way to her door.**

**One of our Enquirers asked me, some years ago, why we needed Holy Communion? Isn’t it enough, she said, quoting the Bible, *to hear the Word of God and to do it?***

**It is questions like that we all need to ask! And to find the ways that Scripture leads us into all kinds of interesting answers. Which is why I mentioned the story of the Feeding of the 5000 in today’s Weekly News. Jesus had been teaching the crowd all day. They had heard the Good News and were all fired up to share it. But what use was that if they didn’t have, at the same time, a sense of the generosity of God too?**

**So despite the anxious calculation of Philip that eight months wages would still only provide a snack for a crowd of that size, Jesus changes the whole situation with the transformation of a boy’s pack-up, a handful of barley loaves and two small fish. The crowd have more than enough. Manna in the desert, bread in Zaraphath, a feast by the lakeside.**

**God doesn’t work small. The only scaling down of what can be done is when we refuse to allow him to work amongst us by our indifference, our lack of vision or our unwillingness to trust him.**

**As we put out our hands for Holy Communion, the unleavened bread we receive can look rather small and inconsequential, especially if we don’t take our time or allow ourselves to take these gifts for granted. But read again the Gospel: this is not bread this is Life with a capital L. *Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no Life in you. Those who eat this bread will live for ever.***

**Through the generosity of God in the desert, in Zaraphath, by the lakeside, here in Islington - and wherever the words are spoken, the bread is broken and the people receive the gifts of God with confidence and with faith: *the bread that I give is the Life of the world.***

**That is the kindness - and the generosity - of God.**

***Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us***

***with 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.***